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SIGNA

A. Starr.

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SIGNA.

SIGNA.

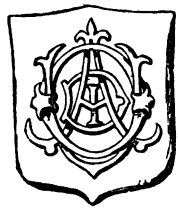
A Story.

By OUIDA.

AUTHOR OF "TRICOTRIN," "PASCAREL," "FOLLE FARINE," ETC.

"Getto una palma al mare, e mi va al fondo,
Agli altri vedo il piombo navigare."—TUSCAN SONG.

I throw a palm into the sea: the deeps devour it.
Others throw lead, and lo! it buoyant sails.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SIGNA.

CHAPTER I.

When he reached Prato it was quite night. Most of the houses were shut up; but, as it had been a great fair day, there were lights in many places, and little knots before winehouse doors, and groups coming and going to the sound of mandolines, laughing and romping about the old crooked streets.

There was a bright moon above the old town where Fra Lippo once lived. The shadows of walls, and gables, and towers, and roofs, were black as jet. The women and youths danced on the pavement, while somebody strummed a guitar for them. There was a smell of spilt wine and dead

flowers. Some mountebanks, in scarlet and blue and silvery spangles, were coming down a lane, having finished their night's work, drum and fife sounding before them.

Bruno saw nothing of all this.

He only looked for a little, thin, pale face with big brown eyes as bright as stars.

He stopped the pony before a little osteria that was open, because some men were still playing draughts and drinking in its doorway, and bid them put the beast in the stable; and asked if they had seen a little boy and a girl somewhat younger, the boy having a fiddle with him, and long hair.

The people did not know; they had not noticed; scores of children and country-folks had been about Prato all the day.

Bruno left the pony and baroccino with them, and wandered out where chance took him. He had no acquaintance in Prato. He had only come there a few times to buy or sell, if there were a good chance to do either with profit.

But he inquired of every creature he saw for the children.

He asked the girls dancing. He asked the old men raking up the melon-rinds and fig-skins out of the dust. He asked the women barring up their casements for the night. He asked the lovers sauntering in the white, moon-lit midnight, with their arms round one another. He asked the dusky monk, flitting like a brown shadow from one arched doorway to another. But none could tell him anything; nobody had noticed; some thought they had seen a little fellow with a violin, but were not sure; one girl had, she knew, and had thought that he had played prettily; and remembered there had been a crowd about him; but where the child had gone, had no idea.

"He must be in the town," thought Bruno, and looked for him in every nook of shadow—under arches or on the steps of shrines, thinking to find them curled up asleep, like kittens after play.

He tramped through and through the town, not staying for any rest or drink, footsore and heartsore, and putting away from him as best he could the dark perplexity of how he should tell

the child the truth, without risking the loss of his affections; or, keeping his secret, save the boy from Lippo.

As he went pondering, with midnight tolling from the ancient bells above him, one of the mountebanks came to him down a dim passage-way, a rose-coloured and gold-bedizened figure, skipping in the shadows with a mask on, and a bladder that it rattled.

"Are you looking for two children?" it said to him through its grotesque visage. "I can tell you of him—a little lad with a fiddle, and a pretty baby, white as a lily. They were here all day in Prato. And this evening Giovacchini, whom we call the Ape, took them both off with him to the sea. They went willingly!—oh, they went willingly! The Ape's children always do; only they never know what they go to! Do you understand? The Ape has such a pretty cajolery with him. He would make the little Gesu off the very altars dance and play for him. But if you are their father, as I take it, follow them to Livorno, the Ape will take ship there at once. Follow them. For the Ape is—not so pleasant when

children once are out of sight of shore. You understand!"

And, singing, the mountebank, with his masked face grinning from ear to ear, rattling his peas in his gilded bladder, skipped away as he had come, too suddenly and swiftly for Bruno to stretch a hand to stay him.

"Is that true?" cried Bruno, with a great gasp. He felt as if a strong hand had gripped his heart and stopped its beating.

An old man, raking the fruit skins that the revellers had left on the stones, looked up from his basket of filth.

"I daresay it is true," said he. "Why not? That man they call the Ape seeks pretty children, and catches some, and takes them off to strange countries, to go about and play and dance, or sell the plaster casts, or grind the barrel organs. I have heard of him. It is a trade, like any other. He always takes care that they go willingly. Still, if you be their father, and have no mind to lose them, best be off. He would be sure to go to sea at once."

"The sea! Where is the sea?" said Bruno.

He did not know, except that it was somewhere where the sun went every night.

"Go to Livorno. They have gone to Livorno safe enough. The Ape will be sure to ship with them, and has got a score more I warrant! Go to Livorno."

"Livorno!" the name told hardly anything to Bruno; it was where the fish came from, that was all he knew, and the river ran there; and now and then from it to Signa there would come some seafaring fellow home for a week to his parents or brothers, bringing with him tales of strange countries, and weeds that smelt of salt, and wonderful large shells; and such a one would put up in one of the chapels a votive-offering, picturing a shipwreck, or a vessel burning on the ocean, or a boat straining through a wild white squall, or some such peril of deep waters from which he had been delivered—that was all Bruno knew.

Except into the great towns to sell or buy seeds or oxen, Bruno had never stirred from the hill he was born on, and to quit it had never entered his imagination.

To him, Livorno was as Nova Zembla or the heart of Africa is to denizens of wider worlds.

The contadino not seldom goes through all his life without seeing one league beyond the fields of his labour, and the village that he is registered at, married at, and buried at, and which is the very apex of the earth to him. Women will spin and plait and hoe and glean within half a dozen miles of some great city whose name is an art glory in the mouths of scholars, and never will have seen it, never once perhaps, from their birth down to their grave. A few miles of vine-bordered roads, a breadth of corn-land, a rounded hill, a little red roof under a mulberry tree, a church tower with a saint upon the roof, and a bell that sounds over the walnut trees—these are their world: they know and want to know no other.

A narrow life no doubt, yet not without much to be said for it. Without unrest, without curiosity, without envy; clinging like a plant to the soil; and no more willing to wander than the vinestakes which they thrust into the earth.

To those who have put a girdle round the

earth with their footsteps, the whole world seems much smaller than does the hamlet or farm of his affections to the peasant:—and how much poorer! The vague, dreamful wonder of an untravelled distance—of an untracked horizon—has after all more romance in it than lies in the whole globe run over in a year.

Who can ever look at the old maps in Herodotus or Xenophon without a wish that the charm of those unknown limits and those untraversed seas was ours?—without an irresistible sense that to have sailed away, in vaguest hazard, into the endless mystery of the utterly unknown, must have had a sweetness and a greatness in it that is never to be extracted from "the tour of the world in ninety days?"

But Bruno was almost as simple and vague in belief as the old Father of History, and the idea of the earth he dwelt on was hardly clearer to him than to any Lake dweller in Lacustrine ages. Dangerous people called Francesi were in great numbers beyond that sea whose west wind sent the rain up, and the floods, and the fish; and in Rome God lived, or St. Peter did—which was

the same thing: so much he knew; but no more; he did not want to know more; it would not have done him any good, the priests said so.

Therefore, when he heard now that the children were gone to the sea shore, it was for him as if they had gone with any falling star into the dusky and immeasurable depths of night. But being a man who thought little but acted fast, and would have followed Signa into the fires of the bottomless pit, he did not tarry a moment, but flung his cloak over his shoulder, and prepared to go straight seaward.

"I will go get the pony," he said, stupidly, like a man stunned, and was moving off, but the old man raking in the dust stopped him.

"Nay: what good is a pony, forty miles if one? If the beast were fresh you would not be in time. The Ape is there by this time. Go by the iron way. So you will get to the sea a little after sunrise."

"The iron way?" said Bruno, dully: the thought was new and strange and weird to him; he saw the hateful thing it is true, winding every day through the green vineshadows underneath

his hill, but to use it—to trust to it—it was like riding the horned Fiend.

"To be sure," said the old man with the rake and basket. "Come—I will show you the way—it is a good step—you will give me something for charity."

"I might get a horse," muttered Bruno, and pulled his canvas bag out and counted his coppers and his little dirty crumpled notes.

He had not very many francs; twenty or so, that was all; just what he had taken in the market on the Friday before. He had never been away from home. He had no idea what travel might cost.

"No horse that you could hire would get by day-break to the sea," said the old man, who knew he would get nothing by his hiring a horse, but thought he might turn a penny by leading him to the rail. "Think—you want those children—and if you saw the ship just out of port and could not reach her—would you forgive yourself? You would never see them again then—never all the rest of your days. The Ape would take care of that. But go by the quick way. They will

come through from Florence in a few minutes. I hear the clock striking."

Bruno shivered a little under his brown skin. Never to see the boy again!—and what would he say to Pippa on the great day when all the dead should meet?

"For the boy's sake," he muttered: there was no peril or evil he would not have run the gauntlet of to serve or save the boy.

"Show me the way—if it be the best way," he said to the old man, with that curious and pathetic helplessness which at times comes over men who, physically courageous, are morally weak.

"Yes, I will show it you. But you will give me something?" stipulated the rag-gatherer, shouldering his basket. Bruno nodded.

The old man hobbled on before him through a few crooked lanes and little streets, throwing quaint black shadows on the moon-whitened pavement with his rake and his rush-skip. Bruno followed; his brain in a dark confusion, and his heart sick for the danger to the boy.

When they reached the place by the Bisenzio Gate, the iron horse already was rushing in

through the cool white night, flinging foam and fire as it came.

It seemed to Bruno as if ten thousand hammers were striking all at once. The showers of sparks seemed to him as from hell itself.

He would watch for thieves alone on the dark hillside in autumn nights. He could break in wild colts to the shafts, and fierce steers to the yoke. He would stride through a hostile throng at a brawl, at a winefair, careless though every man there were his foe. He had the blood in him that has flowed freely from Monteaperto to Mentana. But he was afraid of this unnatural and infernal thing. His fancy was bewildered, and his nerve was shaken by it.

He was like a soldier who will face a mine, but shudders from a spectre.

"It is horrible—unnatural—unchristian," he muttered as the great black engine, with its trail of flame and smoke, stood panting like a living animal.

"But we must use the devil's work when it serves us. All the saints say that," said the old man, dragging him to the hole in the wall, and

twisting his money out of the bag and getting him his pass in due exchange.

Bruno was like a sheep; he followed mechanically; dull with the ghastly fear of what had happened to the boy, and the vaguer personal terror of this unknown force to which he had to trust.

There were great noise, great shouting, hurrying to and fro; roaring of the escaped steam; lights green and red flashing in the dark.

Confused and uncertain, Bruno caught his bag out of the old man's hand, sprang in a hole that someone shoved him to; and felt himself moving without action of his own, with the sparks of fire dancing past his eyes.

"For the boy," he said to himself; and made the sign of the cross under his cloak, and then sat down as he saw others do.

If he went to his death it was in seeking the boy: he would meet Pippa with a clean soul.

The old man hobbled away chuckling. Bruno, true to his word, had given him a penny; but in his palm he held four of the dirty notes, each of one franc.

"I might have taken more," he said to himself, with self-reproach. "He never would have known. The saints send one folks in trouble!"

Bruno was borne on swiftly through the night.

With him there were a monk, a conscript, and two contadini with a basket of poultry between them, and two melons in a handkerchief. An oil lamp burned dully overhead, throwing yellow gleams on the young soldier's boyish face, and the begging-friar's brown cowl, and the black brows of the sleeping peasant women, and the green wrinkled globes of the fruit.

They rocked and thundered, and rattled and flew; the white steam and the rain of sparks drifting past the wooden window.

Bruno was like a man in a nightmare. He only dimly understood the danger assailing the boy. He had heard that men took children to foreign countries; tempting them with fair promises, and then grinding their little souls and bodies in the devil's mill. But it was all vague to him like everything else that was outside the lines of his vines, or beyond the walls of the Lastra.

Only a word of the rag-picker's haunted him like a ghost.

The man would take ship; and he, himself, might reach too late and see the ships sailing—sailing—sailing—and never be able to overtake it or see the face of the child again.

That horror clung to him.

He sat gazing into the night; making the sign of the cross under his cloak, and muttering ever and again an ave.

"You are in trouble my good son?" said the monk.

"Yes, father," answered Bruno: but he said no more. It was not his way to take refuge in words.

A great dull tumult of horror was on him. The strange noise and swaying motion added to it. All the ill that ever he had done in all his life—and it was much—surged up over him. It was divine vengeance on his sins, he thought; he had not clean hands enough even to save Pippa's child. He had been a wild, fierce man, and had never ruled his passions, and had struck rough blows when he should have asked

forgiveness; and had been lawless in his loves, and had made more than one woman rue the day his wish had lit on her.

It seemed to him that it must be his sins which were pursuing him. For the little lad was so innocent: why should this misery befall them else?

His thoughts were all in disorder, shaken together and whirling round and confusing him, so that all he could think of was that ship sailing away and he on shore, helpless:—only now and then, in the midst of his pain, he thought too of his oxen, Tinello and Pastore:—were they hungry?—would the man to whom he had left them have wit to give them their suppers?—would they bellow with wonder at not seeing him in their stable?—if he were a minute late they always lowed for him, thrusting their great white heads over the wooden half-door.

So his thoughts went round and round, and the night train flew on with him past the shining river in its thickets of cane and acacia, and the grey hills silvery in the moonshine, and the knolls of woodland with their ruined fortresses,

and the vineyards that grew green where ruined Semifonte was levelled with the soil; and the silence of walled Pistoia holding the ghost of great Farinata; and Pisa with her cold dead beauty like a lifeless Dido on her bier; and so past the great dense woods and breezy heathery moorlands of the king's hunting grounds, till in the light of the moon a white streak shone, and the monk pointing to it said to them:

"There is the sea."

CHAPTER II.

It was four in the morning.

On the long, low sandy lines of the coast, and on the blue waters, the moonlight was still shining. In the east the great arc of the sky; and the distant mountains, and the plains, with their scattered cities, were all rose-coloured with the flush of the rising day. Night and morning met, and kissed and parted.

Bruno went down to the edge of the sea, as they told him, and looked, and was stupefied. In some vague way the strange beauty of it moved him. This vast breadth of water that was so new to him, sparkling under the moon, with white sails motionless here and there, and islands, like clouds, and, in face of it, the sunrise, awed him with its wonder as the familiar loveli-

ness of his own hills and valleys had no power to do.

He forgot the child a moment.

He crossed himself and said a prayer. He was vaguely afraid. He thought God must be there.

He stood motionless. The rose of the dawn spread higher and higher, and the stars grew dim, and the moon was bathed in the daylight. A boat put out from the shore, and stole softly away across the gleaming blue, making a path of silver on the sea.

Bruno, like a man waking, remembered the warning of the ship: for aught he knew, the boat was a ship, and the child was borne away in it.

His heart grew sick with fear. He stopped the only creature that was near him on the way; a fisherman going to set his pots and kreels in the rock-pools to catch crabs.

"Is that a ship going away?" he asked.

The fisherman laughed.

"That is a little boat, going fishing. Where do you come from that you do not know a ship?"

"Has one sailed yet, since night? Away?—quite away?—not to come back?"

"What do you mean?" said the fisherman. "If you mean the mail-ships or the steamers to Elba or Genoa—no! Nothing will leave port till night. Some will come in. Why do you ask? Do you want to get away?"

The fisher glanced at him with some suspicion.

Bruno's eyes had a strange look, as if some peril were about him.

"You are sure no ship will go away?" he asked persistently.

"Not till nightfall," said the fisherman. "There are none due. Besides, there is a dead calm: see how these rowers pull."

And he trudged on with his lobster-pots and kreels. This man was in trouble, he thought; it was best not to meddle with him, for fear of getting into any of the trouble.

Bruno went on along the wharf.

The natural shrewdness of a peasant's habits of action began to stir underneath the confusion of his brain and the perplexity of his ignorance and his sorrow. In many things he was stupid,

but in others he was keen. He began to consider what he could best do. That great wide water awed him—appalled him—fascinated him ; but he tried not to think of it, not to gaze at it; he looked, instead, up at the moon, and was comforted to see it was the same that hung over the hills of Signa, to light the little grey aziola homeward through the pines. It seemed to him that he was half a world away from the quiet fields where Tinello and Pastore drew the plough beneath the vines.

But he had to find the boy;—that he must do before ever he saw the Signa hills again. He pondered a little, passing along the wharves, then turned into a winehouse that was opening early for seafaring men, and ate some polenta, and drank, and asked them tidings—if they could give any—of a little lad with a violin, who had been stolen.

The tavern folks were curious and compassionate, and would have helped him if they could have done, but knew nothing. Only they told him that if the child had a pretty trick of melody, he would be nearly sure to be taken to earn money

where the gay great people lived southward, along where he could see the tamarisk trees. If he did not find the children in the old town, it would be best to go southwards towards noon.

He thanked them, and wandered out and about all the old, ugly, salt-scented lanes and streets and busy quays, piled with merchandise and fish, and lines of fortifications, and dull squares and filthy haunts, where there was the smell of salt-fish all day long, and the noise of brawling sailors of divers countries, and screaming foreign birds, and the strong odour of fishing nets and sails and cordage.

He heard nothing of the boy; but learned that a ship would go away to the coast of France at sunset.

So at noon, as they had told him it would be best to do, he went along the seashore, southwards, past the lighthouse and through the green lines of feathery tamarisks, that Titania of trees with its sweet breath, that is flower and forest, and spice and sea, and feather and fern, all in one, as it were.

To ask any public authority to aid him never

occurred to him. He had been too often at feud with it in his wild youth to dream of seeking it as any help. Bruno and the guardians of order loved not one another. When he saw them at street corners with their shining swords and their soldiering swagger, he gave them a wide berth; or, if forced to go by them, passed with a fiercer glance than common, and a haughtier step, as of one who defies.

His heart was sick as he went by the shining water. The horror came on him that he had been misled. Neither mountebank nor rag-picker had been sure that the children had come to the shore. At best, it had been only a thought.

Bruno felt for his knife in his waistband, under his shirt. If only he could deal with the man who had taken the boy; and with Lippo.

His soul was black as night as he went along in the full sunshine, with the azure water glowing till his bold eyes ached to look at it.

He had never known till now how well he loved the child.

And if he had drifted away to some vile,

wretched, sinful, hopeless life—the life of a beaten dog, of a stage monkey, of a caged song bird,—if he lived so and died so, what could he say in heaven or in hell to Pippa?

The sweet tamarisk scent made him sick as he went. The play of the sun on the sea seemed to him the cruellest thing that ever laughed at men's pain.

When he came amongst the gay people and the music, and the colour and the laughter of the summer bathers, and the beautiful women floating in the water with their long hair and their white limbs, he hated them all—for sheer pain he could have taken his knife and struck at them, and made the sparkling blue dusky with their death. It was not only the child that he lost; it was his power to save his own soul.

So he thought.

He went through the long lines of the tamarisks a brown straight figure, with naked feet and bold eyes full of pain, like a caught hawk's, in the midst of the fluttering garments and the loosened hair, and the mirthful laughter and

the graceful idleness of these bathers, whom Watteau would have painted for a new voyage to Cytherea.

Bruno did not notice what he was amongst. The Tuscan blood is too republican to be daunted by strange rank or novel spectacle. Whatever be its other faults, servility is utterly alien to it, and a serene dignity lives in it side by side with indolent carelessness.

Bruno went through these delicate patricians, these picturesque idlers, these elegant women, as he went through the poppies in the corn. They were no more to him.

He had come into the environs of the Ardensa, with the pretty toy villas glittering on each side of him, and in front the Maremana road, with bold brown rocks and sheep-cropped hills, going away southward to the marshes and to Rome; and on the sea, boats with wing-like sails, some white, some brown, and the coral fishers' smacks at anchor, and in the sunlight the violet shores of Corsica.

All at once his heart leaped.

He heard the notes of a violin, quite faint and

distant, but sweet as the piping of a blackbird amongst the white anemones of earliest spring.

There were ten thousand violins and more in the world. He did not think of that. To him there was but one.

He made his way straight towards the sound.

It came from a group of tamarisks and evergreens set round a lawn some short way from the shore where the luxurious bathers, after their sea plunge, were gathered in a little throng, with all the eccentric graces of apparel that fashion is amused to dictate to its followers.

His heart leaped with surer joy as he drew nearer and nearer; he recognised the song that was being sung, a rispetto of the people, strung to an old grand chaunt of the sombre Neapolitan Traetta; which Signa, having heard the air of it on the sacristan's organ, had played night after night on his little lute, sitting outside the door of Tinello and Pastore's stable, while the sun went down behind the hill.

Morirò, morirò, sarai contenta
Più non la sentirai mia afflitta voce!
Quattro campane sentirai sonare
'Na piccola campana a bassa voce.

Quando lo sentirai 'lmorto passare
Fátti di fuora, che quella son io
Ti prego, bella, viemmi a accompagnare
Fino alla chiesa per l'amor di Dio
Quando m'incontri, fallò il pianto amare
Ricòrdati di me quando t'amavo
Quando m'incontri, volgi i passi indietro
Ricòrdati di me quand' ero teco.

I shall die, shall die; and thou wilt be content.
Thou wilt no longer hear my lamentation.
Four bells will ring upon thine ear for me,
And one small bell much lower than the rest!
When thou shalt learn the dead is passing by,
Come forth to see me, for that dead am I.
I pray thee, love, come forth to come with me,
Come to the church for the dear love of God;
And when thou see'st me, gather bitter plants,
And think of me in our dead days of love;
And when thou see'st me, turn thy steps within,
Think of me in the time when I was thine.

Tuscan Rispetto.

Bruno knew nothing of the name of the air, but he knew the words, and with a great cry, he pushed his way into the brilliant circle.

The music ceased; the child looked up, he was standing in the midst of the graceful women and idle men playing and singing, with big tears rolling down his cheeks.

Gemma, with a scarlet riband in her short gold locks, and her hands full of sweetmeats, was run-

ning from one to another of the listeners, taking all they gave.

"Signa!" cried Bruno.

The boy stopped a moment, lifting his great eyes in piteous uncertainty of what was right to do; then the impulse of affection, and of habit, and of home were too strong for his resolution of self-sacrifice; he sprang into Bruno's outstretched arms.

"O take me back, take me back, and Gemma too!" he sobbed; and you will not hurt Lippo? promise me, promise me—because they will hurt you; and that is why I ran away, for fear that I should bring you harm. But I am so unhappy. Gemma laughs and loves it all; but I—— O take me back to the Lastra, and they will tell me there if I have hurt Nita and ought to die. But promise me about Lippo first—promise me!"

Gemma stood looking; the sea-wind blowing the scarlet riband in her curls; she pouted sulkily, and ate a sweetmeat.

"I promise you," said Bruno; his eyes were blind, his lips trembled; he held the boy in his arms and kissed him on the forehead. Then he

set him down, and his hand went to his knife, and a sudden savage remembrance swept across his face, and darkened out of it all tenderness of emotion.

"Let me get at the brute—point him out," he said, in his teeth, while his eyes glanced over the gathered people.

But there were only the languid idlers staring at him, and asking each other if it were a concerted scene to enhance the charm of the little fellow's playing. The man, Giovacchino, had disappeared at the first glimpse of the stalwart peasant coming on his errand of vengeance.

Had Bruno known what his face was like, he would have had but little chance of reaching him in the mazes of the tamarisk groves; as it was, pursuit was impossible. He took the two children by the hand, "Point him out, boy—show me him," said he, breathlessly.

But Signa, bewildered, stared around, and could see nothing like his tempter.

"He is gone, I think," he whispered, clinging to Bruno's cloak. "He was not a bad man; he was very kind."

"He was very good, and I want him," said Gemma, with a flood of tears. "He has promised me pink shoes, and a coral necklace, and a little gilt carriage to ride in, and a harlequin toy that one can put on the floor to dance."

"What is it?" said the loungers. "Is it a comedy scene to make one admire the children in new parts?"

Bruno seized Gemma roughly, and took Signa by the hand.

"Let us get home," he said, and the rage died off his face, and a great serene thankfulness came on it.

He had back the boy.

Pippa would know he tried to keep his word. The man might go unpunished.

Signa clung to him mute and half out of his wits with the sudden wonder of this deliverance from the fate he loathed. Bruno to him had been Providence always—as other children see the strength of godhead in their parent's care, so he in Bruno's. To feel that Bruno was there was to Signa to be ransomed out of death. He was speechless and dizzy with his joy.

The idlers under the tamarisks watched him, supposing it some portion of the programme of these pretty children, who had come upon the sands that morning; the boy, with a voice so sweet, that the child Hadyn himself never sang more divinely those famous trilli for the famous cherries that in old age he loved to recall with such delight; and the girl with such a little face of grace, that she might have stepped straight down from any tryptich of Botticelli, or flown from any ceiling of Correggio.

"Where are you going to take him? Is the boy your son?" said one of the gentle people, who had been giving their money and their pretty trifles to hear Signa sing and play. "Do you know he is a little Mozart? What do you mean to do with such a genius as his? Not bury it? Tell me all about him. Where do you live?"

But Bruno flashed a dark glance of suspicion over the elegant throng, and answered nothing, only moved his hat in half defiant courtesy of farewell, and turned away, afraid that if he stayed some other means would be found by some one to take the child away.

His hand gripped Signa's firmly.

"Let us get home," he said.

Signa smiled all over his little pale startled face.

"To the Lastra!" he said, with a little sigh of sweetest self-content.

"What genius!" said the throng left under the tamarisk trees.

"What is genius?" thought Signa. "But anyhow if I have it, it will go home with me. I did not get it here."

"Why do you cry, Gemma?" he said aloud.

Gemma hung back and stamped her foot, and sobbed with fury, letting all her gilded sweets and pretty treasures of painted paper, fall on the sand as she went.

"I will not go back; I will not go back," she said. "I want the pink shoes, and the gilt carriage. We have nothing to eat at home, and you heard them all say I am so pretty. I want to hear them say it again. I will not go back; I will not!"

"But I am going, too," said Signa.

Gemma pushed him away and struck at him

with her rosy little fists. But no one heeded her rage.

Bruno dragged her along without attention to her lament, and Signa for once was indifferent to her; he clasped his violin close, and he was going back to the Lastra; he was so happy, that it almost frightened him.

He seemed to have lived years since he had run along, with the angel's gift, by the Greve water three nights before.

Bruno went back straight to the winehouse in the town.

He asked them if they were hungry. They were not. The man who had decoyed them had fed them well; till they were out of sight of shore stolen children had nothing but goodness at his hands; the mountebank in scarlet had only said the truth.

There was a rough, kindly woman at the winehouse. Bruno gave her Gemma to take care of for the few hours that had to pass before they could get away to the Lastra.

Gemma was crying sullenly; she hated to go back; she wanted this pretty gay world that she

had had a glimpse of, that was all ribbons and sweetmeats and praises of her prettiness; she hated to be taken to the bed of hay, to the crust of black bread, to the lonely garden, to the trouble of hunting hen's eggs, and killing grubs in the flowers, and beating sheets with stones in the brook with Palma.

Then he took Signa out into the open air. It seemed to him that what he had to say had better be said there. Between four walls, Bruno, hill-born and air-fed, felt stifled always.

The boy and he went silently down to the edge of the sea once more.

Signa was startled and subdued.

He felt as if he were a child no longer, but quite old.

He had known what it was to be adrift on the world, to gain money; to be be heartsick for home; to hear that he had some great gift that other people wondered at; the contrast and conflict of all these varying emotions had exhausted him. And he was sorry too about Gemma. Gemma, who cried for a strange life, for a strange country, for

a strange man—Gemma, who cared more about a scarlet band in her curls, and a gilded box of sugar, than ever she had done for all his music or caresses.

Signa had had his first illusion broken.

He was no longer only a child.

Fair faiths are the blossoms of life. When the faith drops, spring is over.

Amidst his great mute happiness at his own home there was a dull pain at his heart. He had found that beyond the mountains he was no nearer God.

Bruno watched in silence along the sea. They came at last along the level shore to a little creek, where the brown rocks cast deep shadows, where the water was in golden shallow pools, full of sea-weeds and sea-flowers; where the town was sunken out of sight behind them, and they were quite alone with the wide blue radiance before them in the splendour of the noon.

"Sit here," said Bruno; and threw himself down upon the rock. Signa obeyed him, letting his little brown leg hang over into the pool, and feel the cool sparkling ripples break against them.

Bruno watched him.

Even now the boy was not thinking of him.

Signa with dreaming eyes was looking out to the sea and the sky, and his hand was, by unconscious instinct, touching such soft minor chords on the strings of his Rusignuolo.

"What are you thinking of?" said Bruno, abruptly. He was jealous of these far-away thoughts that he could never follow.

Signa hung his head.

"I do not know—hardly. Only I wondered—why does God make the earth so beautiful and men so greedy?"

His own thoughts were sadder and wider than this, but they were dim to him; he could not put them into better words.

"I suppose it is the devil," said Bruno; he had no better reason or consolation to give.

Religion gives no better.

Signa shook his head. It did not satisfy him; but he could find no better himself.

"It is the devil," repeated Bruno, who believed firmly in what he said.

And he watched the child anxiously; he

was oppressed with his own secret; he hated himself because he had not had courage that night of the flood to bear poor dead Pippa to her grave, and tell the simple truth. The truth looked so simple now; so easy and so plain; he marvelled why he had been fool enough to hide it—truth always has this vengeance soon or late.

None desert her without seeing that she would have been their noblest friend. Only often it is too late when they do see it. Once driven away with the scourge of lies she is very hard to call back.

"Lippo ill treats you?" he said, abruptly, having resolved to rend the spider's web that he had let his brother weave about him.

Signa withdrew his gaze from the sea with a sigh. On that world of waters he saw such beautiful things: why must he be brought back to the misery of blows and hunger and ill words?

"You have promised me not to hurt him," he said, anxiously. "They said you would hurt him —if you knew."

"And that is why you never told me?"

"Yes. And why I ran away."

"Tell me everything now."

The boy obeyed. Bruno listened. His face was very dark. He did not look up; he lay on the rock full length, resting his chin on his hands.

"I am sorry that I promised you."

That was all he said when Signa's little tale of childish woes and wrongs was ended. But there was a sound in his voice that told the child why they had said in the Lastra that Bruno, if he knew, would do that upon his brother which would take him himself to end his days in the galleys.

"But you *have* promised," said Signa, softly.

Bruno was silent.

He was a fierce man, and in his passion faithless, and in his ways wild and weak at once, oftentimes. But he never broke a promise—not even one made to the beasts in the yoke of his plough.

There was a long silence, in which the gentle ripple of the water sounded clear; the intense silence of noon when all things are at rest. After

a while Bruno rose and lifted the child up, and set him between his knees, sitting on a great brown heap of rocks.

"You have been very unhappy?"

"Sometimes," said Signa.

"And were silent for fear of evil I should do?"

"Yes:—for fear that they would harm you."

"You do love me then?"

"You are good to me."

"Would you love me if I did the evil?"

"Just the same."

"You would not be afraid of me?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"You would never harm me."

"But if I did a great crime?"

"I would hate that;—but I would love you."

"Who teaches you all this?"

"I seem to hear God say it—when I make the music—I do not know."

Bruno was silent.

He put the boy from him, and leaned his head

on his hands. Then suddenly he spoke, not looking up; very quickly and any how.

"Listen, I want to tell you the truth. I have hid it because I was a coward—at first from fear of trouble and of the people's talk—and of late because I wanted you to love me, a little, and thought you would not if you knew. Listen, dear. It was such a simple thing. I was a fool. But Lippo put it so. I must have been a coward, I suppose. Listen, I had one sister, Pippa, a young thing; pretty to look at, and idle as a lizard in the sun. I was rough always, and too fierce and quick. They tell you right to be afraid of me. I have done much evil in my years. I was always a brute to Pippa. I had a sort of hate of her. When the girl came my mother looked at none of us. I see her now—a little brown baby laughing or crying all day long, and my mother thinking of nothing but of her. I see her now in the sun under the Pieta in the house door, her little red mouth sucking at the breast, and mother so proud and singing, and talking of the time when she would want her marriage-pearls. I hated her. No matter—I

knew it was a sin. I was rough and cruel with Pippa, grudging her all pleasure and all play-time, and when the mother died she had a hard time of it with me:—yes, I know. And at a winefair she would dance when I forbade her, and mocked me about a woman—never mind—and I struck my knife into her. I should have killed her only the people held me back, and the knife turned on the busk of her boddice, and only stabbed the flesh. You see I was a brute to her. That is what I want you to understand. Well—then—one day she went away. I cannot tell where she went to—no matter. And the years went by. And one night, the night of the great flood that you have heard us tell of—Lippo and I seeking the sheep, came on a woman in the field. She had fallen down over the height, from that road we go on from the town up to the hill. She was quite dead. She had a child. We saw that it was Pippa. Then Lippo urged to me—the sheep would drown; the girl was dead—the town might say that we had murdered her; he thought it best to say nothing till the morning. We took you; we took the child. We left her

there till morning. The river rose. It took her body with it. We never found it. Then Lippo urged again—why say that it was Pippa? It would do no good. People would think we were ashamed of her, and so had killed her. We could not prove we had not. What use was it to say anything. The river had her. So I let it be. I was a coward. Then there was the child. Lippo would send it to charity. He had too many mouths to feed. But that I would not have. For Pippa's son. I got Lippo to keep it with his own, giving him half of all I got. He has had half and more. His children have fattened like locusts off my land. You know that. I thought he used you well. You never told me. I did for the best. Lippo has cheated me. Dear—you are Pippa's son. I got to love you. I was afraid that you would hate me if you knew. I have been a coward. That is all. Will you forgive me?—Your mother does, I think."

Signa had listened with breathless lips and wide-opened, startled, wondering eyes.

When the voice of Bruno ceased, he stretched his arms out with a little bewildered gesture;

glanced round at sea and sky one moment, then tottered a little, and fell in a dead faint:—the long fatigue, the tumult of emotion, the peril and the pain that he had undergone, the wild delight of rescue and the hope of home, and now the story of his mother and her death, all overcame his slender strength. He fell, quite blind and senseless, down at Bruno's feet.

When consciousness came back to him his hair and clothes were drenched in the sea water; Bruno hung over him tenderly as a woman; Signa lifted himself and gazed, and stretched his hand out for the violin, and saw Bruno, and remembered all.

"That was my mother!" he said, bewildered, and could not understand.

Bruno's eyes were wet with tears, salt as the sea.

"You do not hate me, dear?" he said, with a piteous entreaty in his voice. "I have tried to do right by you since. I think she is not angry, longer, if she knows."

"No," said Signa, dreamily; confused as though he had been stunned by a heavy fall.

"That was my mother?" he repeated, dully; he did not understand; the owls had never found him on the flood then; he had always thought they had.

"Yes; you are Pippa's son. I have tried to do the best. You do not hate me—now?"

Signa put his arms round Bruno's neck.

"No. I love you. Take me home."

CHAPTER III.

It was late in afternoon when they got back to the tavern by the wharves.

The child walked beside Bruno, very pale, and still, and sorrowful.

"You will not hurt Lippo?" he said once.

"I have told you no," said Bruno.

Then once he asked:

"Had I a father too?"

"No doubt, dear!"

"And why have I not his name? The other children have their father's name."

"How can we tell what it may be?"

He could not say to the child—"You have no claim on it."

"And where is he?" persisted Signa.

"I cannot tell. I know nothing," answered

Bruno, impatient of the theme. "Pippa—your mother—went away to some strange country. We never knew anything more. Girls do these things, sometimes, when they are not happy."

"Then my father may be—a king?"

"A beggar more likely. Anyway a rogue. Why think of him?"

"Why a rogue?"

Bruno was silent.

"Your mother came back very poor, by the look of her," he said, after a while. "And sad she must have been, or she would never have thought of her old home."

Signa was silent too. Then he said, musingly,

"Perhaps he would care to hear me play. Do you think so? When Carlo Gerimino makes at home figures in wood,—dogs, and mice, and birds, just what he sees—his father is so proud, and promises to have him taught great things when he is old enough."

"Do not think of him, I tell you, dear," said Bruno, with impatience. "You have me. I will do all I can. Think of your Holy Child and your wooden bird; that is better far. He may

be dead, and so that and want together drove her here. Anyway, it is of no use to vex your heart for him. We can never know——"

"I thought the owls found me," said Signa, sadly, and dragged his little tired feet along, bewildered; while the old violin clangoured against him, and his head was bent, and his hair was hanging over his eyes.

He would have sooner chosen that the owls had found him. This sudden story, told in fragments, and never clearly, as was Bruno's way, oppressed him with a sense of mystery and sorrow.

Pippa's son? What did that mean!

He did not understand.

But he understood that he would live with Bruno always, and with Tinello and Pastore, and with the sweet wild hillside, all rosemary scented, and dark with the cistus, and the myrtle, and the pine, and that made him glad—that comforted him.

"What beautiful things I shall hear all the day long," he thought; for when he was alone, where the leaves were, and the sky was above

him, he heard such beautiful things, that it was the cruellest pity that they should ever be driven away by the rough noise of Toto's fretting, and Nita's rage, and the girls quarrelling, and the baby's screams, and the jar of the housework, and the creak of the pump-wheel, and the curses of old Baldo on the gnats and flies.

When they reached the sailors' winehouse by the wharf, the boy was so tired that he had almost lost all consciousness of anything that went on round him. But at a great rush of voices, and in the foul-smelling doorway, his dreamy eyes opened, and his dulled ears were started to attention, for he heard the woman of the place calling aloud:

"And who could have thought? a casement no wider than one's thumb, as one may say? and how she could get through it passes me; the man must have helped her from outside. As the saints live, I took every care. I kept her in the little room at the back, that has the tamarisk in at the window, and shells, and seaweeds, to amuse her, and a beautiful picture of my husband's sister's son, of the Martyrdom of the

blessed Lorenzo. And she had a good bowl of soup, and a roast crab, and a handful of figs—eating for a princess—and ate it all, every bit, she did; and then she seemed tired and sleepy, and no wonder, thought I, and I laid her down on the bench with a pillow, and just locked the door on her, and went about my work, and thought no more, because my husband is always a poor thing, and there are so many men coming and going, there is more than one woman can get through—up at four, and to bed at past midnight, as I am. And then, looking out in the street, and seeing you coming with the little boy and the fiddle, I went to wake her up, and the room was empty, and some of the tamarisk twigs broken and tumbled down on the floor, so that, of course, through the lattice she must have gone, and the man must have been there to help her out. The window looks on a lane; there is nobody ever there; oh, he might have done it quite well, only so small as the hole is—that beats me. And it is no fault of mine, that Our Lady knows; and why must you be leaving her with me? and you will pay me for the soup, and

the crab, and the figs, because she has got them away in her stomach."

"Is Gemma lost!" cried Signa, with a piteous wail in his voice, that stopped the woman's torrent of phrases.

"Yes, dear; it seems so," said Bruno, in perplexity. "But we will find her for you. Do not cry, Signa, do not cry; you hurt me when you cry."

But to find her was beyond Bruno's powers. He traced her to the quay, led by a man; that was all he could hear.

They had gone in a smack that sailed away, bound for Gorgona, at three in the afternoon. Some sailors on the wharf remembered noticing the golden-headed, chattering, little child; she seemed so happy to be off; the smack was some strange one from some of the islands; no Livornese craft; it had come in the day before with pilchards; they supposed that the man had got the owner of it to give him a lift over water; no one had known that there was any need to interfere; they said that the father of the girl had better come and see: no one else could have any right to meddle.

That was all Bruno could learn.

They were quite certain the child with the red ribbon and bare feet had gone to sea; they showed him the distant sail, speeding fast over the waves, which were now freshened by a breeze that had sprung up; by the direction she was taking, they did not think that she was going to Gorgona; anyhow, no one would overtake her till long after nightfall.

Signa stood and sobbed his heart out by the sea.

Bruno pondered a little; he could do no good, and he had barely enough coins upon him to get home, and had no credit in this strange town, nor any friend; besides, who could tell, if Tinello and Pastore were well fed? They might be stolen — heaven alone could tell; if the men threshing with him were not faithful, no one could say what evil might not happen, nor what ruin nor what blame the fattore might not lay upon him for his absence without a word. To stay another night away was impossible; he could do no good to Gemma, and would be penniless himself upon the morrow, and powerless to return.

He pondered a little while, then paid the woman at the winehouse for the crab and figs that she lamented over, and made his way back in the full red sunset heat by the iron way he hated, half-leading, half-carrying the boy into the waggon, where Signa wept for his playmate, till he wept himself to slumber, as the train, groaning, started on its way, leaving the brilliancy of the golden west and the blue sea, to plunge across the marshy wastes by Pisa, and traverse the green vine country, where the Ave Maria bells were ringing, and pause in the still twilit ancient towns, and so reach the hills above the Lastra.

It was quite dark when they reached the hill of Signa.

Bruno, quite silent, looked up with a longing glance to the purple lines of pine, where his vines were, and where Tinello and Pastore dwelt in their shed under the great magnolia tree. But before he turned his steps thither, he had to tell of Gemma's loss; he pressed money on her father, and sent him seaward, on the vague chance that what they had heard might be untrue; then

holding Signa by the hand, he went straight down into the Lastra.

It was eight of the night.

Bells for the benediction offices were ringing from many chapel towers on the hills; single sonorous bells answering one another under the evening shadows, and calling across the hills.

The people were all about, idling at their doors, or in knots of three or four talking of the many little matters that make up the history of a country summer day. There was hardly a lamp alight. The moon had not risen.

But the men and women all knew Bruno as he came down into the midst of them with the stately tread of his bare swift feet.

A stillness fell upon them. They thought he came to take his brother's life most likely. They drew a little into their own doors, and others came up from passages and houseways.

"Where is Lippo?" he asked of them.

No one answered. But by an involuntary unconscious glance that all their eyes took, it was easy for him to see slinking away on the edge of the throng the slender supple figure of his brother.

"Wait there!" cried Bruno. "I shall not harm you—coward."

Lippo paused; by some such fascinated fear as makes the bird stay to be done to death at the snake's will.

"People of the Lastra, I have something to say," said Bruno, standing still; a tall, brown, half bare figure in the gloom, with the boy beside him; all the people ran out to listen; men and women and children, breathless and afraid; what could he be doing with words, he, whose weapon was always straighter and swifter than any speech can be?

The voice of Bruno rang out loud and clear; reaching the open windows and the inner courts, and the loiterers at the gateways.

"I have something to say. I am a rough man. It is easier to me to use my hand, but I want to tell you,—it is just to the child. You remember that I was bad to Pippa. I was cruel. I stabbed her, even; you will remember. She was a gay girl, but no harm. She forgave it all; she said so. We never heard of her: you remember that. She went—that was all. That

night of the flood we found her dead, Lippo and I; quite dead, under the bank by the sea-road; just above there. There was a child with her: this child. I left her alone in the night out of fear, and because of the shame of it, and for the sake of the sheep, and because they might have thought that we had killed her—Lippo said so. At dawn I meant to go and tell the Misericordia, and go and bring her in and get her decent burial by holy church. I meant so: that I swear. But at daybreak the flood had got her. Now you know. It was of no use to say anything then—so Lippo said. It was as if one had murdered her. But the good God knows how it came. I got Lippo to take the boy. I said that I would pay for him; give half I got for him—always. I have done it. I thought the boy was happy and well fed. Sometimes I had words with him for the child's sake. But on the whole, I thought that all was well. For nine years Lippo has had my money and my money's worth. For nine years he has lied to me, and beaten and starved and hurt the child. For nine years he has lied to me, and cheated me. You know me.

I would kill a man as soon as a black snake in the corn; but I have promised the boy. I lost the boy and found him by the sea. The saints are good. The child ran away because he feared that I should do ill on his behalf, and fall into the power of the law. For him I will let Lippo be. If it were not for the child, I would kill him as one kills a scorpion—so! You know me. Go, tell him what I say. Though we live both for fifty years, let his shadow never fall between me and the sun; if he be wise. This is the truth. He has lied to me and cheated me. I do not forgive. Women and dogs may forgive. Not men. This very day the child might have perished, body and soul. And what should I have said to Pippa before God's face when the dead rose? That is all."

He paused a moment to see if any one would answer there in Lippo's voice or Lippo's name. But the darkening groups, half lost in the night shadows, were all still; silenced by amazement and by fear.

Then Bruno turned, and with the boy's hand still in his, went through the western gateway,

and up the road, beneath the trees towards the river and the bridge, homeward.

When he was quite lost to sight the outburst of tongues buzzed aloud, like swarming bees under the stars.

Was this the truth, indeed? and hid so long!

Bruno went on his way over the cloudy waters to his hills.

CHAPTER IV.

So the truth was told at last.

And the Lastra, of course, after taking the night to consider, rejected it as a fiction.

When truth in any guise comes up from her well, she has the fate of Genevra, when Genevra rose from the tomb; every door is closed and bolted, and friends look her in the face and deny her.

In the Lastra, after the first surprise of Bruno's speech had passed away, there remained very few believers in his story.

Old Teresina, who had always said that he was the better man of the twain; and Luigi Dini, who had seen him at a deathbed or two, and thought he had a soft heart under a hard hide; and his friend Cecco, the cooper, who made casks and

tubs under the line near the bridge, with the old workshop with the barred window, and the vine behind it; these three and a few women, who had loved Bruno in other years, and had sore hearts still, when they stopped working to think —these did believe; but hardly anybody else.

At the time of his speaking, no one had heard him without belief.

There was that strong emotion, that accent of truth, which always cleave their way to the hearts of hearers, however hard those hearts be set in antipathy or opposition.

But after a while, feeling his way by little and little, and stealing softly into the minds of his townsfolk, Lippo, wandering about with his sweetest voice, and tears in his eyes, sighed and murmured that he would not speak; nay, let poor Bruno clear himself, if he would; he did not wish to say anything. He could clear himself. Oh, yes: as easily as you could split a melon in halves. People knew him. He was a poor man and of no account, but he had tried always to do good. He had been wrong; yes, that he felt; twice wrong in giving the shelter

of his roof to his brother's base-born one, and then, again, in letting the infirmity of anger master him about all that good gold squandered on a squeaking toy. But in nothing else, so far as he could judge himself—searching his heart. As for poor Pippa, heaven knew he had sought high and low, vainly, for years and years, and never could get tidings of any fate of Pippa's. There had been a dead woman and a child found, but not by him; a woman Bruno had driven to her ruin; but, no, he would say nothing. The Lastra knew him and his brother both. Let it judge which spoke the truth. Only this, he swore by all the hosts of saints, no scrap of Bruno's money or morsel of food off Bruno's land had he or his ever touched in these nine years. The child he had taken in out of sheer pity, Bruno turning against his duty to it. But, there, he would say nothing. He was glad and thankful when some natural feeling had awakened in Bruno for the boy:—who knew what good it might not bring to that poor darkened soul? If he wanted witness, there was Adamo, the wineseller, who had seen him thrown brutally off the shafts of

Bruno's baroccino, and had heard his life threatened by him; but, there—no—he would say nothing. The neighbours knew him. As for gratitude, that no man might look for; but it was hard to be maligned after nine years' forbearance. But the saints had borne much more and never took their vengeance. In his own humble, poor little way, he would endeavour to do like them.

So Lippo, to the Lastra,—softly and by delicate degrees; and such is the force of lying, a force far beyond that of truth at any time, that two-thirds of the town and more believed in him and pitied him. For, start a lie and a truth together, like hare and hound; the lie will run fast and smooth, and no man will ever turn it aside; but at the truth most hands will fling a stone, and so hinder it for sport's sake, if they can.

Lippo, jeopardised in credit a few days, recovered ground, and, indeed, gained in the public estimation, with time; so very prettily did he lie.

The parish priest took his part, and that went far; and the counsel of the Misericordia did the same, and that went farther still.

Lippo, a good soul, who rarely missed early Mass, and often came to Benediction; who never did anything on holy days, except lie on his face in the full sun, and made his children do the same; who, if he was offended, kept a tongue of oil and lips of sugar; and who was almost certain to have all Baldo's savings, when that worthy should be gathered to his father's: Lippo, plausible and popular, and always willing to loiter and chatter at street corners and play at dominoes and take a drink:—Lippo had a hold on public feeling that Bruno never would have gained, though he had shed his life-blood for the Lastra.

Most people knew, indeed, that Lippo was a liar; but then he was so excellent a man that they respected him the more for that.

So Lippo recovered his standing, and even heightened it; and kept well out of the way of his brother; and was browbeaten by his wife within doors for the loss of all the gain the boy had been to them, but went to mass with her all smiles, and on feast-days with his children was a picture of felicity; and so no one was the

wiser for what quarrels raged under the tiles of Baldo's dwelling by the Loggia.

And only old Teresina and Luigi Dini and Cecco and such like obstinate simpletons believed, or admitted they believed, that Pippa had been found dead on the night of the great flood.

Why should they have believed it? It is dull work to believe the truth.

Bruno in return bent his straight brows darkly on them, and kept his knife in his belt, and let them shout evil of him till they were hoarse in market-place and wineshop.

He was hated by them just as Lippo was believed in; he was unpopular just as Lippo was popular.

"Well, let it be so," he said to himself. He was indifferent.

"Other folk's breath never made my soup-pot boil yet," he would say to the old priest of his own hillside, who would sometimes remonstrate with him on the misconstruction that he let lie on him. "They believe in Lippo. Let them believe in Lippo. Much good may it do to him and them."

But the old Parocco shook his head, having a liking for this wild son of the church, of whose dark, fierce, tender, self-tormenting soul he had had true glimpses in the confessional, when Easter times came round and men of their sins disburdened themselves.

"But it will do you harm," said he. "The walnut-tree laughs at ants; but when the swarm is all over its trunk and in its sap, where is the tree then?"

But Bruno bent his delicate dark brows, that made him like a head of Cimabue's drawing; and smiled grimly. If every man's hand were against him, he cared nothing: he had his good land to till, and the boy with him in safety.

If he could have wrung his brother's throat he would have been happier indeed. As it was, having promised the boy, he passed Lippo in the Lastra with such a glance as Paul might have given to Judas; and otherwise seemed no more to remember that he lived, than if he had been a dead snake that he had flung out in the road for the sun to wither.

"The same mother bore you," the priest

would urge sometimes, "and you honour the same God."

"What has that to do with it?" said Bruno. "Though he were my father, I would do just the same. He cheated me."

"But forgiveness is due to all."

"Not to traitors," said Bruno.

And no one could move him from that faith. And Lippo would go a long way round outside the gates rather than meet that glance of his brother's in the narrow thoroughfares of the Lastra.

Though on the whole, good man, the neighbours pitying him, he was the better for the wrath of Bruno, especially since he was quicker than ever to answer to the Misericordia bell, and droned louder than ever his responses of the mass, being wise in his generation.

CHAPTER V.

So the child went up to the hills with Bruno, and stayed there for good and all, with Tinello and Pastore, and the big magnolia tree, and the old gilded marriage coffer, and the hens and the chickens, and the terra-cotta annunciation, and the drying herbs and beans, and the big white dog from the Maremma marshes, and the palm blessed on Easter day.

He was not quite the same.

He would never be quite the same again, Bruno thought—and thought aright.

The child's vision had widened, and his thoughts had saddened; and he knew now that there was a living world outside his dreams; and he doubted now that the skies would ever open to let him see the singing children of God.

And alas! though he cried his heart out for her, Gemma never returned.

Sandro came back without her, and cried a little for a week, but was not disconsolate, and on the whole found his nutshell of a house more tranquil without the little sulky, self-willed beauty. But Palma mourned her long; and her playfellow likewise.

Palma was sure that Gemma was dead. "She fell in the sea and was drowned: else she would come back," said Palma always, powerless to comprehend that any deliberate choice could keep her sister long away from her. She had loved Gemma with that extreme affection which a profoundly selfish nature often begets on a very generous one. She had sacrificed herself for Gemma twenty times a day with delight in the sacrifice. Any little treat, any better food, any morsel of fruit, she had always saved for Gemma; she had waited on Gemma as if she had been born a little negro, and the other a little princess; she had always taken Gemma's misdeeds on her own shoulders, and screened her, and served her in all possible ways. Gemma had been the woe

and torment of her childish life; but she had never known it; Gemma had also been its idol. The shrewdness and the laziness of Gemma had taught her to make a scapegoat and a slave of Palma, when they had been mere babies. Palma had been happy in the servitude. She had firmly believed that Gemma had loved her in return; and so she had done, when she had wanted her.

"She is drowned; else she would be back," said Palma, to all attempts of others at consolation, and she hid a little scrap of black ribbon, all she could get, about her little brown throat, and having saved up a penny, by great toil, with centime pieces, took it to the priest of the church above Giovoli, and, sobbing, intreated him to say a prayer for Gemma's soul. The old man put back her penny, and forbore to smile, and said a mass for nothing—being touched.

What might be Gemma's fate, no one could tell; children were kidnapped—so they said in the Lastra; and borne away to carry plaster statues, or skip on a strained rope, or play in circus-tricks, or wander with a monkey, and were beaten if they returned to their masters with too few coins at

night—so they said: and the Lastra was sure that this would be the fortunes of lost Gemma. But Signa, full of agonised remorse for her, still felt in his own heart that it was likelier that some way Gemma would not suffer very much. "She will always suck the orange herself, and fling the peel in some one else's eyes," said Bruno, when he spoke of her; and Signa, though he resented the saying, and would not assent to it, knew in his heart that it was true.

"I was so wicked to let her go with me!" said Signa often, in bitter self-reproach. But the good-natured Sandro did not reproach him.

"My dear," he said, "when a female thing, however small, chooses to go astray, there is not the male thing, however big, that could ever hinder her."

Sandro never looked beyond his pots of pinks and beds of roses; but he knew so much human truth as that.

What Gemma had gone to, who could tell?—wandering with little Savoyards and Roman image-sellers, or dancing with dogs and monkeys, in rainy streets of northern towns, or under the

striped canvas of merryandrews' booths; that was what most of the children did who were tempted and taken over sea.

"Anyhow, wherever she is gone she is happy if she has got a bit of ribbon in her hair and a sugar-plum upon her tongue, and she will get them for herself, I will warrant, anywhere," said Bruno, who could not have honestly said that he was sorry she was lost.

But Signa, when he said these things, cried so that he ceased to say them; and gradually the name of the sunny-headed little thing dropped out of memory except with Signa and Palma, who would talk of her often in their leisure minutes, sitting under the wall by the fountain watching the old speckled toads come and go, and the chaffinches preen their white wings, and the cistus buds unfold from the little green knots, and the snakes' bread turn ruby red till it looked like a monarch's sceptre dipped in the bloodshed of war.

Whenever at night the storm howled, or the snow difted over the face of the hills in winter, Signa would tremble in his bed, thinking of his

poor lost playmate, as she might be at that very hour houseless and friendless on the cruel stones of some foreign town. His imagination tormented him with vision and terror of all the possible sufferings which might be falling to her lot.

"It was my fault—it was my fault," he said incessantly to himself and everyone; and for a long time utterly refused to be comforted. When the great day of his first communion arrived, and he went, one of a long string of white-clad children, with his breviary in his clasped hands, and little brown shabby Palma behind him with the other girls, Signa felt the hot tears roll down his cheeks, thinking of the absent, golden-headed, innocent-eyed thing, who would have looked so pretty with the wreath of white wild hyacinths upon her head.

"The boy is a very lamb of God; how he weeps with joy at entering the fold," thought the good old Parocco, from the hills, looking at him.

But Signa was thinking of Gemma.

"Dear love, do not fret for her," said Tere-

sina, that very day, after the service of the church, in her own little room over the Livornese gate, "never fret for her. She is one that will light on her feet and turn stones to almonds always: trust her for that."

But Signa did fret; though he knew that they were right.

And he had lost his own mystery and wonder for himself. He was nothing strange that the owls had found in the soft night shadows and dropped down at the gates of Signa, as he had always thought.

He was only Pippa's son.

Poor Pippa! She was not dear to him. He could not care for her. When he went along the sea road he had no instinct of remembrance of the night that he had lain against her breast and had had his cries hushed upon its aching warmth.

Just Pippa's son, as Toto was Nita's—this was all?

That the angels had breathed upon him and said to each other, "Let this little soul see light," and then had dropped him softly on the waters,

and so the white wise birds had found him and borne him to the Lastra, there to grow up and hear about him the music of the heaven he had been sent from—that had been intelligible to him, and had seemed quite natural and beautiful and true.

But Pippa's son, as Toto was Nita's!

This was pain to him and perplexity. It made all dark.

A child's feet are bruised, and stumble on the sharp stones of a hard, physical, unintelligible fact.

He was much happier, in truth, than he had ever been: unbeaten, unstarved, unpunished; with only the free, fresh, open-air toil to do; and the man's strong affection about him for defence and repose; and often allowed to wander as he would and play as he chose, and dream unhindered as he liked;—his life on Bruno's hillside, was beside his life in the Lastra with Lippo, as liberty by slavery, as sunshine by rain.

And yet a certain glow and glory were gone out of his day for him; because of this truth about himself which to himself was so much less easy

of understanding than the vaguest fable or wildest miracle would have been.

Pippa's son! — no brighter born or nearer heaven than that.

It was his faith and fancy that were bruised and drooped like the two wings of some little flying bird that a stone strikes.

The boy had something girlish in him, as men of genius have ever something of the woman; and all that was gentlest and simplest in him suffered under the substitution of this harsh, sad history of his birth, for all his pretty, foolish faiths and fancies.

But in all the manner of his life he was much happier.

In the country of Virgil, life remains pastoral still. The field labourer of northern countries may be but a hapless hind, hedging and ditching dolefully, or at best serving a steam-beast with oil and fire; but in the land of the Georgics there is the poetry of agriculture still.

Materially it may be an evil and a loss—political economists will say so; but spiritually it is a gain. A certain peace and light lie on the

people at their toil. The reaper with his hook, the plougher with his oxen, the girl who gleans amongst the trailing vines, the child that sees the flowers tossing with the corn, the men that sing to get a blessing on the grapes—they have all a certain grace and dignity of the old classic ways left with them. They till the earth still with the simplicity of old, looking straight to the gods for recompense. Great Apollo might still come down amidst them and play to them in their threshing-barns, and guide his milk-white beasts over their furrows,—and there would be nothing in the toil to shame or burden him. It will not last. The famine of a world too full will lay it waste; but it is here a little while longer still.

To follow Tinello and Pastore as they ploughed up and down the slanting fields under the vines, dropping the grain into each furrow as it was made; to cut the cane and lucerne for the beasts, and carry the fresh green sheaves that dripped dew and fragrance over him as he went; to drive the sheep up on to the high slopes, where the grass grew short and sweet, and the mosses

were like velvet under the stone pines, and lie there for hours watching the shadows come and go on the mountains, and the bees in the rosemary, and the river shining far down below; to load the ass and take him into the town with loads of tomatoes or artichokes or pumpkins or salads, as the season chanced to be, and ride him back amongst the hills, dreaming that the "cucco" was a war-horse, and the pines the serried lines of spears, and he a paladin, like Rinaldo, of whom he had read in an old copy of the "Morgante Maggiore" that lay in the sacristan's chest in the Lastra, the sacristan holding it profane but toothsome versifying; to keep watch over the grapes near vintage time in the clear moonlit nights when the falling stars flashed by scores across the luminous skies, and see the day-dawn rise and the sun mount over the far Umbrian hills, and wake all the birds of all the fields and all the forests into song; to pluck the grapes when they were ripe, with the bronzed leaves red and golden in the light, and load the waggon and dance on the wine-press till his feet were purple, while all over the hillsides and along

the fields by the water far and near the same harvest went on, with the echoes of the strife and the play and the laughter and the bursts of song making all the air musical from the city to the sea;—this was the labour that he had to do, with kindly words and with easy pauses of leisure, the passing of the months only told by the change of the seeds and the fruits and the blossoms, and by the violets and the crocuses in the fields giving place to the anemones and the daffodils, and they to the snow-flakes and the narcissus, and they to the scarlet tulip and the blue iris, and they to the wild-rose and the white broom, and they to the traveller's joy and the yellow orchid, and so on through all the year, with as many flowers as there were hours.

The life on the hillside was full of peace for him, and wholesome labour and innocent freedom and all those charms of this country of sight and scent and sound which either are utterly unknown, unfelt, incomprehensible, or are joys strong as life and fair as children's dreams; for men and women are always either blind to the things of

earth and air, or have a passion for them: there is no middle-way possible.

You shall know "the hope of the hills" in its utmost beauty, or know it never.

Signa did know it, small creature though he was, and wholly untaught; and the joy of the hills was with him day and night whilst he dwelt here so high in air, with the deep mountain stillness round him and the sky seeming nearer than the earth.

Weeks and months would go by, and he would not leave the hillside for an hour, having no other companions than the little wild hares and the gentle plough-oxen and the blue jays that tripped amongst the white wakerobins, and the sheep that he would drive up under the beautiful red-fruited arbutus thickets, while far down below the world looked only like a broad calm lake of sunshine—like a sea of molten gold.

The child was tranquillised, though he was saddened, by that perfect solitude.

It was the most peaceful time also that Bruno's life, tempestuous though monotonous, had ever known.

Since he had lost the boy, he had come to know as he had never done before the full force of his great love for him. Signa was not to him only a creature that he cared for with all the strength of his nature, but he was like a soul committed to him straight and fresh from the hands of God, by care of which, and by all means of self-devotion and self-sacrifice, he was to redeem his own soul and to secure an everlasting life.

He did not reason this out with himself, because reasoning was not the habit of his mind; but it was what he felt every time that he bowed his head before an altar or knelt before a crucifix. He prayed, with all his heart in the prayers, that he might do the best for the lad in all ways.

Most days he went on bread himself that he might be able to give meat twice a week to the growing boy. He went to the fairs in the early day, and left them as soon as his traffic was done; so that he might not spend money in roystering, and get fighting as of old. He looked away from women, and strove not to be assailed by them; so as

to waste his substance on their tempting. He laboured on his fields even earlier and later than he had ever done, to make them produce more; and so have means to get little trifles of pleasure or better nourishments for the boy. He grew more merciless at bargains, harder in buying and selling; he gave no man drink, and flung no feast-day trinkets into women's breasts: all the Tuscan keenness became intensified in him—he laboured for the boy.

Folks said that, losing his open-handedness, he lost the one saving grace and virtue he had had in him: he let them say it—if he were pitiless on others he was no less so on himself. He combated the devil in him—what he called the devil—because he could not let the devil loose to riot in his blood, as he had used to do, without lessening the little he had, and that little would be the all of Pippa's son.

Now that Signa was under his roof and always present with him, his love for the boy grew with each day. The sort of isolation in which his ill-repute and evil tempers had placed him with his countryside, made the companionship and the

affection of this little human thing more precious than it would have otherwise been.

And as Lippo's story obtained footing more and more in the Lastra, and the taverner's tale of how he had struck Lippo off the cart under the pony's hoofs spread and took darker colours, men and women looked colder than ever upon him, and avoided him more and more. Why should they not ?—since now he never bought their absolution with a drink and the cards for the one sex, and bold wooing and free money for the other.

So the years rolled quietly on, without incident and with no more noteworthy memory in them than the excellence or the paucity of the vintage, the large or small yield of the Turkish wheat, the birth and the sale of a calf, the dry weather and the wet.

Only to Bruno a great aim had been set, a great hope had arisen.

Before he had worked because he was born to work, now he worked because he had a great object to attain by every stroke that he drove into the soil, by every heat-drop that fell from his brow like rain.

There was a little piece of ground on the hillside which was much neglected—a couple of fields, a strip of olives, and a breadth of wild land on which the broom and myrtle only grew. It ran with the land which Bruno farmed, and he had often looked at it longingly.

It was allowed to go to waste in a great degree; but Bruno knew the natural richness of the soil, and all that might be done with it; and it had the almost priceless advantage of a water-course; a mountain-fed rush-feathered brook, running through it. To own a little bit of the land entirely is the peasant's ideal of the highest good and glory, everywhere, in every nation. Nine times out of ten the possession is ruin to themselves and the land too. But this they never will believe till they have tried it.

It was Bruno's ideal.

All the other land of the hillside was the duke's, his padrone's; that he never thought of possessing any farther than the sort of communism of the Tuscan husbandry already accorded it to him. But this little odd nook always haunted and tempted him to passionate longing for it.

It belonged to a carver and gilder down in the city. It was said that the man was poor and incapable, and often in difficulty. Bruno, who was not a very good Christian in these matters, used to wish ardently that the difficulty might drift as far as bankruptcy, and so the morsel of soil come into the market.

For he had an idea.

An idea that occupied him as he drove Tinello and Pastore under the vines, and looked across at those ill-tilled fields, where the rosemary had it nearly all her own way, except where the bear's berry and the wild cistus and the big sullen thistles and the pretty little creeping fairy-cups disputed possession. An idea that grew more alluring to him every night as he smoked his pipe before sleeping, and watched the first ripple of moonlight on the little brook under the brush-reed, the gardener's rush, and the water-star.

It so grew with him that one day he acted on it, and put on a clean blue shirt, and threw his best cloak over one shoulder with the scarlet lining of it turned back; and, being thus in the most ceremonious and festal guise that he knew of, he went

first to his own fattore, who was a good old man and his true friend, and then took his way straight down into the city.

A few weeks later Tinello and Pastore were driven through the rosemary and turned it upside down, and a pruning-hook shone among the barren olives, and a sickle made havoc amongst the broom-reeds in the little brown stream, and the gardener's rush was cut too to tie the broom-reeds up in bundles.

There was no one there to see except a neighbouring peasant or two, who knew Bruno of old too well to ask him questions; and the fattore, when he rattled up-hill in his little baroccino, knew what was doing, and stopped to look with approval.

But when rumours of it in time filtered down the hillside to the city market-place—as rumours will, trickling through all obstacles like water—and busybodies asked the carver and gilder in his dusky shop in the shadow of the Saints of Orsanmichele, whether it were true that he had sold the land or not, the man said "No," and said it angrily.

"How could any man," he asked, "sell any place or portion of his own in this now-law-beridden country without his hand and seal and all his goods and chattels and his price and poverty being written up and printed about for any gaping fool to read?"

Which was true: so the busybodies had to be content with conjecture; and Bruno, with whom busybodies never meddled any more than dogs do with a wasp's-nest, worked on the little nook of land at his odd hours, till the rosemary dared show her head nowhere, and the brook thought it only lived to bear brooms for the market.

This addition made Bruno's work more laborious than ever; but then it was of his own choice if he did so, and no affair of anyone's. Besides, no one except its own peasants ever concerned themselves with what went on upon this big, bold, lonely hill, with its lovely colours and fragrant smells, that had the sunset blaze over it every night in burning beauty in weather serene, or dark with storm. It was his fattore's business only, and his fattore was content.

And the carver and gilder was so, down in the

city by Orsanmichele; for every month on a market-day he had a little roll of much soiled bank-notes, and these were so rare to him that they were thrice welcome. Whatever else Bruno's secret might be, he kept it—with a mountaineer's silence, and a Tuscan's reticence.

Tinello and Pastore turned the first sod of this bit of land in the month when Signa was found and Gemma lost; and Bruno always took an especial pleasure in sending the boy to work on that little brook-fed piece of the hill rather than on any other.

He himself never neglected his own acres; but he took a yet greater pride in this small slope, which he had made golden with corn; and those old rambling trees, which he had made bear as fine olives as any on the whole mountain side.

On great feast or fast days—when even Bruno, who was not altogether as orthodox as his Parocco said he should be, in being useless on the hundred odd days out of the year that the Church enjoins, let his plough, and spade, and ass, and ox be idle—he would, as often as not,

saunter down into this nook, taking the boy with him; and for hours would loiter through the twisted olive boughs, and sit by the side of the pretty, shallow, swift water running on under the sun and shade, with the tall distaff canes blowing above it, with a dreamy pleasure in it all, that he never took in the land, well as he loved it and cared for it, where his father's fathers had lived and died, ever since Otho's armies had swarmed down through the Tyrol passes, and spread over the Lombard and the Tuscan lands.

"You are so fond of these three fields. Why is it?" said Signa, one day, to him, when they walked through the green plumes of the maize that grew under the olives.

"They were barren; and see what they are now. I have done it," answered Bruno.

And the boy was satisfied, and cut the brook reeds into even lengths, sitting singing, with his feet in the brook and his face in the sun.

He thought so little about these things: he was always puzzling his brain over the old manuscript music down in the sacristy in the Lastra. Whenever Bruno let him go off the hillside he ran

thither, and sat with his curly head bent over the crabbed signs and spaces, sitting solitary in the window that looked on the gravestones, with the ruined walls and the gateway beyond, all quiet in the sunshine.

The music which the old Gigi had most cared for and copied, and gathered together in dusky, yellow piles of pages, was that which lies between the periods of Marcello of Venice, and Paësiello, and which is neglected by a careless and ingrate world, and seldom heard anywhere except in obscure, deserted towns of Italy, or in St. Peter's itself.

There was no one to tell Signa anything about this old music, on which he was nourished.

The names of the old masters were without story for him. There was no one to give them story or substance; to tell him of Haydn serving Porpora as a slave; of Vinci, chief of counterpoint, dying of love's vengeance; of Paësiello gathering the beautiful, savage, Greek airs of the two Sicilys to put into his operas, as wild flowers into a wreath of laurel; of Cimarosa in his dungeon, like a blinded nightingale, bringing into his

music all the gay, rich, elastic mirth of the birth country of Pasquin and Polichinello; of Leo marrying the sweet words of Metastasio to sweetest melody; of the dying Mozart writing his own requiem; of the little scullion, Lully, playing in the kitchen of the Guise the violin that the cobbler had taught him to use; of Stradella, by the pure magic of his voice, arresting the steel of his murderer on the evening stillness of San Giovanni Lateranno; of Pergolese breaking his heart under the neglect of Rome, while Rome—he once being dead—loved and worshipped him, and mourned him with bitter tears, and knew no genius like his; of Jacopo Benedetti, the stern advocate, leaving the world because the thing he loved was slain, and burying his life in the eternal night of a monk's cell, and as he penned his mighty chaunts, and being questioned wherefore, answering weeping, "I weep, because Love goes about unloved."

There was no one to tell him all these things, and make the names of his dead masters living personalities to him. Indeed, he knew no more than he knew the magnitude of the planets and

distance of the stars, that these names which he found printed on the torn, yellow manuscripts, a century old or more, were of any note in the world beyond his own blue hills.

But he spelt the melodies out, and was nourished on them:—on this pure Italian music of the Past, which has embalmed in it the souls of men who followed Raffaelle, and Mino, and Angelico, and Donatello, and who breathed in all the mountain-begotten and sea-born greatness of "il bel paese Ch'Appennine parte e'l mar circonda, e l'Alpi"—men who were as morning stars of glory, that rose in the sunset of the earlier arts.

CHAPTER VI.

"You never come to the garden now," said Palma. "You are always in the sacristy."

"The music is there, and Gigi will not let me bring it away," said Signa.

"But what do you want with that music?" said Palma. "You make it so beautifully out of your own head."

Signa sighed.

"I learn more—playing theirs. You like my music; but how can I tell?—it may be worth nothing—it may be like the sound of the mule's bells, perhaps."

"It is beautiful," said Palma.

She did not know what else to say. She meant very much more than that.

Signa was fifteen now, and she was the same.

Palma was a tall, brown girl; very strong, and somewhat handsome. She had her dark hair in great coils, like rope, round her head; and she had an olive skin, and big brown eyes, like a dog's. She had a very rough poor gown, far too short for her, and torn in many places; she wore no shoes, and she worked very hard.

She was only a very poor common girl; living on roots and herbs; doing field work in all weathers; just knowing her letters, but that was all; rising in the dark, and toiling all day long till nightfall, at one thing or another. And yet, with all that, she had a certain poetry of look in her—a kind of distant kinship to those old saints of Memmi's on their golden grounds, those figures of Giotto's with the fleur-de-lys or the palms. Most Tuscans have this still—or more or less.

With the rest and food that Bruno allowed to him, and the strong hill air, which is like wine, Signa, from a little, thin, pale child, had grown into a beautiful youth: he was very slender, and not so strong as the young contadini round him; but the clear, colourless brown of his skin was

healthful; and his limbs were agile and supple; and his face had a great loveliness in it, like that of Guercino's Sleeping Endymion. And his empress of the night had come down and kissed him, and he dreamed only of her; she was invisible, yet filled all the air of heaven; and men called her Music—not knowing very well of what god she comes, or whither she leads them, or of what unknown worlds she speaks.

It was a noon, and Palma had snatched a moment of leisure, to gnaw a black crust, and to sit under the south wall, and to talk to Signa, who had come for melon-seeds for Bruno.

She loved him dearly; but he did not care very much for her. All the love he had in him outside his music he gave to Bruno.

Bruno he had grown to love strongly since the story by the sea: he did not wholly understand the intense devotion of the man to himself, but he understood it enough to feel its immeasurable value.

With Palma and him it was still the same as it had been on the night of the white currants and green almonds. He kissed her carelessly, and

she was passionately grateful. They had been playmates, and they were often companions now.

Only he thought so little about her, and so much of the Rusignuolo, and the old manuscripts in the Misericordia Church.

And Palma knew nothing; which is always tiresome to one who knows something, and wants to know a great deal more, as Signa did. The lot of an eager, enquiring, visionary mind, cast back on its own ignorance, always makes it impatient of itself and of its associates.

The boy felt like one who can see amongst blind people: no one could understand what he wanted to talk about; no one had beheld the light of the sky.

Palma indeed loved to hear his music. But that did not make her any nearer to him. He did not care for human ears.

He played for himself, for the air, for the clouds, for the trees, for the sheep, for the kids, for the waters, for the stones; played as Pan did, and Orpheus and Apollo.

His music came from heaven and went back

to it. What did it matter who heard it on earth?

A lily would listen to him as never a man could do; and a daffodil would dance with delight as never woman could;—or he thought so at least, which was the same thing. And he could keep the sheep all round him, charmed and still, high above on the hillside, with the sad pines sighing.

What did he want with people to hear? He would play for them; but he did not care. If they felt it wrongly, or felt it not at all, he would stop, and run away.

"If they are deaf I will be dumb," he said. "The dogs and the sheep and the birds are never deaf—nor the hills—nor the flowers. It is only people that are deaf. I suppose they are always hearing their own steps and voices and wheels and windlasses and the cries of the children and the hiss of the frying-pans. I suppose that is why. Well let them be deaf. Rusignuolo and I do not want them."

So he said to Palma under the south wall, watching a butterfly, that folded was like an

illuminated shield of black and gold, and with its wings spread was like a scarlet pomegranate blossom flying. Palma had asked him why he had run away from the bridal supper of Griffeo, the coppersmith's son,—just in the midst of his music; run away home, he and his violin.

"They were not deaf," resumed Palma. "But your music was so sad—and they were merry."

"I played what came to me," said Signa.

"But you are merry sometimes."

"Not in a little room with oilwicks burning, and a stench of wine, and people round me. People always make me sad."

"Why that?"

"Because—I do not know:—when a number of faces are round me I seem stupid; it is as if I were in a cage; I feel as if God went away, farther, farther, farther!"

"But God made men and women."

"Yes. But I wonder if the trapped birds, and the beaten dogs, and the smarting mules, and the bleeding sheep think so."

"Oh, Signa!"

"I think they must doubt it," said Signa.

"But the beasts are not Christians, the priests say so," said Palma, who was a very true believer.

"I know. But I think they are. For they forgive. We never do."

"Some of us do."

"Not as the beasts do. Agnoto's house-lamb, the other day, licked his hand as he cut its throat. He told me so."

"That was because it loved him," said Palma.

"And how can it love if it have not a soul?" said Signa.

Palma munched her crust. This sort of meditation, which Signa was very prone to wander in, utterly confused her.

She could talk at need, as others could, of the young cauliflowers, and the spring lettuces, and the chances of the ripening corn, and the look of the budding grapes, and the promise of the weather, and the likelihood of drought, and the Parocco's last sermon, and the gossips' last history of the neighbours, and the varying prices of fine

and of coarse plaiting; but anything else—Palma was more at ease with the heavy pole pulling against her, and the heavy bucket coming up sullenly from the water-hole.

She felt, when he spoke in this way, much as Bruno did—only far more intensely—as if Signa went away from her—right away into the sky somewhere—as the swallows went when they spread their wings to the east, or the blue wood-smoke when it vanished.

"You love your music better than you do Bruno, or me, or anything, Signa," she said, with a little sorrow that was very humble, and not in the least reproachful.

"Yes," said Signa, with the unconscious cruelty of one in whom Art is born predominant. "Do you know, Palma," he said suddenly, after a pause. "Do you know—I think I could make something beautiful, something men would be glad of, if only I could be where they would care for it."

"We do care," said the girl gently.

"Oh in a way. That is not what I mean," said the boy, with a little impatience which daily

grew on him more, for the associates of his life. "You all care; you all sing; it is as the finches do in the fields, without knowing at all what it is that you do. You are all like birds. You pipe—pipe—pipe, as you eat, as you work, as you play. But what music do we ever have in the churches? Who amongst you really likes all that music when I play it off the old scores that Gigi says were written by such great men, any better than you like the tinkling of the mandolines when you dance in the threshing barns? I am sure you all like the mandolines best. I know nothing here. I do not even know whether what I do is worth much or nothing. I think if I could hear great music once—if I could go to Florence——"

"To Florence?" echoed Palma.

It was to her as if it were a thousand leagues off. She could see the gold cross, and the red roofs, and the white towers gleam far away in the plain against the mountains whence the dawn came, and she had a confused idea that the sun rose somehow out of the shining dome; but it was to her like some foreign land: girls live and old women

die within five miles of the cities, and never travel to see them once; to the peasant his paese,—his hamlet,—is the world. A world wide enough, that serves to hold him from his swaddling bands to his grave clothes.

"To Florence," said Signa. "There must be great music there. But Bruno will never let me go. If there be vegetables to take to the city, he takes them himself. He says that cities are to boys as nets to birds."

"But why?" began Palma, having eaten her crust, and with her hands braiding the straws one in another.

But Signa pursued his own thoughts aloud:

"There is a score of a man called Handel in the church. It is a part of what they call an oratorio; a kind of sacred play, I suppose, that must be. It is marked to be sung by a hundred voices. Now, to hear that—a hundred voices! I would give my life."

"Would it be better than to hear some one singing over the fields?" said Palma.

Signa sighed.

"You do not understand. The singing over

the fields, yes, that is beautiful too. But it is another thing. Some one has scribbled in old yellow ink on some of the scores. In one place they wrote, 'This Miserere of Jomelli, sung in the Sistine this Day of Ashes, 1752; fifty-five voices, very fine.' Dear! To hear that!—it must be to the singing in the fields like the lightning on the hills to a glowworm."

"The lightning kills," said Palma, meaning simply what she said, and not knowing that she pointed a moral in metaphor.

"I must go back with the seeds, Palma," said the boy, rising from under the old south wall.

He was not vexed with her, only no one understood—no one, as he said to the Rusignuolo, when he went home with the basket slung at his back, playing the violin as he went over the hills, as his habit was, while the little children ran down through the vines to listen, and the sheep stood on the ledges of the rocks to hear, and the hollowed crevices gave the sound back in faint, sweet, faithful echo.

Palma, plaiting as she walked, went to her father's cottage, and laid her straw aside, and

twisted her short skirt as high as her knees, and went down into the cabbage bed and worked; hard labour that made her back bend like an osier, and her brown skin wet with heat, and her feet cold and black with the clinging soil.

He lived in the air like a white-winged fringuillo; and she in the clods like a poor blind mole.

"We are nothing to him, anyone of us," she thought, and a dew that was not a raindrop fell for a moment on the crisp green cabbage leaves.

But she hoed and weeded and picked off the slugs, and scolded herself for crying, and laboured ceaselessly all the afternoon over the heavy earth; and then put a pile of the cabbages into a great kreel, and carried it on her back into the Lastra, and sold it for a few coppers; and then went home again to make her brother's shirts, and draw the water that filled the troughs of bark that ran across the plot of ground, and clean her poor little hovel as well as she could with five boys and a pig and hens and chickens always sprawling on the floor; and when the sun set, washed the mud off her limbs,

and climbed the ricketty ladder into the hole in the roof, where her straw mattress was, with two bits of wood nailed in the shape of a cross above it.

Palma worked very hard. In winter, when the bitter mountain wind was driving everything before it in a hurricane whose breath was ice, she had to be up and out in the frosty dark before day, no less than in the soft dusk of the summer dawns. She had all the boys to attend to and stitch for; her father's clothes to make; the cottage to keep clean as best she might: she had to dig and hoe, and plant the slip of ground on which their food grew: she had to help her father often in the great gardens: she had to stand on the square stone well, and draw the water up by the cord and beam, which is a hard task even for a man to do, long together; and, finally, in all weathers, she had to trudge wherever she was wanted, for the good-natured Sandro was as lazy as he was cheery, and put labour on what shoulders he could, so only they were not his own.

If ever she had a minute's leisure, she spent it

in plaiting, and so got a few yards done a week, and a few coppers to add to the household store; for they were very poor, with that absolute poverty which is often glad to make soup of nettles and weeds; frequent enough here, and borne with a smiling patience which it might do grumbling northern folk, whose religion is discontent, some good to witness if they could.

This was Palma's life always; day after day; with no variety, except that sometimes it was cabbages, and sometimes lettuces, and sometimes potatoes, and sometimes tomatoes; and that when the sun did not grill her like a fire, the north wind nipped her like a vice; and when the earth was not baked like a heated brick, it was a sodden mass that she sunk into like a bog. This was always her life.

Now and then she went to a festival of the saints, and put a flower in her rough black braids as her sole means of holy-day garb; and twice a year at Ceppo and at Pasqua tasted a bit of meat. But that was all: otherwise her round of hours never changed, no more than the ass's in the brick-kiln mill.

Nevertheless she put up her cross above her bed, and never laid herself down without thanking the Heavenly Mother for all the blessings she enjoyed.

The State should never quarrel with the Churches. They alone can bind a band on the eyes of the poor, and like the lying watchman, cry above the strife and storm of the sad earth, "All's well! All's well!"

Palma never thought for a minute that her lot was a hard one. Her one great grief had been losing Gemma. Under all else she was happy enough; a brave, and cheerful, and kindly girl, and with no evil habit or coarse thought in her; and pure as Una, though she had to stand on the well-edge with bare arms and legs, gleaming like bronze in the sun, and the wind blowing her poor thin skirt like a leaf.

Meanwhile the boy went up the hill-side thinking not all about her.

He was thinking of an epitaph he had seen in an old book the day before—an epitaph from a tomb under an altar of St. Simon and St. Jude in Rome:—

"JOHANNES PETRUS ALOYSIUS,
PALESTRINA
MUSICÆ PRINCEPS."

He was thinking how beautiful a thing it would be to die, if one were only sure of having "Musicæ Princeps" written above one's rest under the golden glory of St. Peter's dome.

He was no longer content, like the boy Haydn, over a wormeaten clavecin — content with the pleasure of sound and of fancy, and pitying kings because they were not as he.

He was no longer content thus.

The desire of eternal fame—the desire of the moth for the star—had entered into him.

He had no thought to be unkind to those he lived with; but he became so, innocently and unwittingly.

All his mind and heart were with those crabbed manuscripts in the sacristy, and with the innumerable harmonies and combinations thronging through his brain. He wanted to learn; he wanted to understand; he wanted to know how others had been able to leave to the

world, after their death, those imperishable legacies of thought and sound. He could only dream uselessly; puzzle himself uncertainly; wonder hopelessly: he thought he had power in him to do something great, but how could he be sure?

Meanwhile he was only a little peasant riding out with the barrels of wine, pruning the olives, shelling the maize, driving the cow up to her pasture under the pines. And Bruno said always, "when you come after me"—"when you are a man grown and sell corn in the town market yourself"—"when you are old enough to go in on a Friday and barter"—and ten thousand other phrases like these, all pointing to one future for him as the needle points to the pole.

The boy was heavy hearted as he went up the hill-path.

Sometimes he was ungrateful enough to wish that Bruno had never followed and found him on the sea-shore; that he had wandered away with Gemma into the dim tangle of an unknown fate. All his affections clave to the beautiful mountain

world on which he lived; but all his unsatisfied instincts fluttered like young birds with longing for far flight.

Sometimes he wondered if there were any great man whom he could ask—and was vexed that he had lost the little bit of paper by the waterside the night he had run from the Lastra. It might have been of use—who could tell?

"Are you tired?" said Bruno, that evening. "You should not tire. At your age I could walk from here to Prato and back, and never a bead on my forehead nor a muscle weary."

"I am not tired," said Signa. "I was thinking."

"You are always thinking. What good does it do?"

"I was thinking:—ever so many hundred years ago, down in the city, I have read that three men, a Corsi, a Bardi, and a Strozzi, found poet and composer, musician and singers, all themselves, and gave the city an opera in Palace Corsi; the second it ever heard. Are there any nobles like that now?"

"I do not know. And how can you tell what an opera is?"

"I can fancy it. Gigi has told me."

"An opera is a pretty thing. I do not deny it," said Bruno, too true a son of the soil to be deaf to the charms of the stage. "When I was a youngster; indeed always before—before I had more to do with my money—I was for ever going down to get a standing-place in the summer theatre: the women round you, and the fine music, and the big moon overhead—oh, yes, I used to care for it very much; but after all they are follies."

"Would you let me go—and hear one?"

Signa's eyes lit, all the paleness and fatigue went out of his face, he looked up at Bruno as a spaniel at his master.

"What for?" said Bruno, sharply. "If you want merrymaking, they dance every night down at Fiastra, the girls and the boys."

Signa's face fell; he went without a word into his own little bedchamber.

To jump about in the droll Tuscan rigadoon, and to whirl round plump Netta or black Tina —that was not what he wanted. But how should Bruno understand?

He could hear the sound of the bell from the roof of the Fiastra farm, calling the dancers along the hillside, but he shut his door and sat down on his bed and took out his violin.

After all, it was the only thing that could understand him.

His small square casement was open; clematis flowers hung about it; the vast plain was a vague silvery sea, full of all the beautiful mysteries of night.

He played awhile, then let the Rusignuolo fall upon his knee and the bow drop. What use was it? Who would ever hear it?

The fatal desire of fame, which is to art the corroding element, as the desire of the senses is to love—bearing with it the seeds of satiety and mortality—had entered into him, without his knowing what it was that ailed him.

When he had been a little child, he had been quite happy if only the sheep had heard his music, and only the wandering watercourse answered it. But now it was otherwise. He wanted human ears to hear; he wanted all the millions of the earth to sing in chorus with him.

And no one of them ever would.

The power in him frightened him with its intensity and its longing: his genius called on him as the Jehovah of Israel called on the lad David; and, at the summons of the solemn unseen majesty, all the childhood and the weakness in him trembled.

He sat quite quiet, with the violin upon his knee, and his eyes staring out at the starry skies.

The heavens were brilliant with constellations: Red Antares flamed in the south; the Centaur lifted his head; and radiant Spica smiled upon the harvest. The moon was at the full, and all the sky was light, but it did not obscure "the length of Orphiuchus large," nor the many stars held in the Herdsman's hand, nor the brilliancy of Altair and Vega.

Bruno, working out of doors under the house-wall, heaving up the buckets from the tank, and watering his salad plants in the evening coolness, noticed the silence. He was used to hear the sweet sad chords of the Rusignuolo all the evenings through, outstripping the living nightingales' song.

"Perhaps he is beginning not to care for it," he thought; and was glad, because he was always jealous of that thing, for whose sake the boy was so often deaf and blind to everything around him.

"When he knows what I have done," thought he, letting the bucket down into the splashing water, that glittered like a jewel in the starlight. "When he knows all I have done, and sees his future so safe, and feels the manhood in him, and knows he will be his own master, then all these fancies will go by fast enough. Strong he never will be perhaps, and he will always have thoughts that no one can get at. But he will be so happy and so proud, and his music will just be a toy for him—nothing more: just a toy, as Cecco's chitarra is when he takes it up out of work-hours. He will put away childish things—when he knows the saints have been merciful to me."

And he stopped to cross himself, before he took up the rope and drew up the pail and flung the water over the rows of thirsty green plants.

The saints had been merciful to him.

All things had thriven with him since the day he had told the truth in the Lastra. The seasons had been fair and prosperous. The harvests large. The vintages propitious. There had not been one bad year, from the time he had taken the boy home in the face of his neighbours. Everything had gone well with him. It seemed to him that every grain he had put into the earth had multiplied a millionfold; that every green thing he had thrust into the mould had brought forth and multiplied beyond all common increase.

He had laboured hard, doing the work of three men; sparing himself no moment for leisure or recreation; crushing out of himself all national inborn habits of rest, or of passion; denying himself all indulgences of the body; toiling without cessation when the hot earth was burning under the months of the lion and scorpion, as when the snows drifted thick in the ravines of the Appennines. And now his reward was almost at hand.

He almost touched the crown of all his labour.

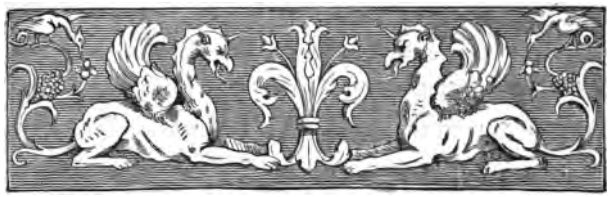
He thanked the saints and crossed himself,

then flung the last shower of water over his plants, and went indoors to his bed with a heart at ease.

"He is tired of his toy; he is not playing," he thought, as he closed the household bars and beams against the sultry lustre of the night, and set his old gun loaded against his side, and threw his strong limbs on his mattress with a sigh of weariness and a smile of content.

After all he had done well by Pippa's child:—in a very little while he would have bought the boy's safe future, and housed it from all risks, so far as it is ever possible for any man to purchase the good-will of fate.

The saints were very merciful, thought Bruno; and so thinking fell into sleep with the stillness and the fragrance of the summer night all about him in the quiet house.



CHAPTER VII.

Four months later, on a Sunday morning, Signa and he walked to their own parish church over the ploughed land for early mass.

The bells were ringing all over the plains below. Their distant melodies crossing one another came upward on the cool, keen air.

The church was exceeding old, with an upright tower, very lofty and ruddy coloured, and with an open belfry that showed the iron clapper swaying to and fro, and the ropes jerking up and down, as the sound of the tolling echoed along the side of the hill.

The brown fields and the golden foliage sloped above and below and around it. A beautiful ilex oak rose in a pyramid of bronzed foliage against its roof. The few scattered peasants who were

its parishioners went one by one into the quietness and darkness and stillness. The old priest and a little boy performed the offices. The door stood open. They could see the blue mountain side and the vines and the tufts of grass.

Bruno this morning was more cheerful and of more gaiety of words than the boy had ever seen him. His character was deeply tinged with that melancholy which is natural to men of his country, where their passions are strong, and which lends its dignity to all the countenances of Sarto's saints, of Giotto's angels, of Fra Bartolemmeo's prophets, of Ghirlandaio's priests; countenances that anyone may see to-day in the fields of harvest, or in the threshing-barns, anywhere where the same sun shines that once lit the early painters to their work.

Bruno kneeled down on the bricks of the old hill church with the truest thanksgiving in him that ever moved a human heart; one of the desires of his soul had been given him; going through the fields he had thought, "Shall I tell him yet?—or wait a little." And told himself

to wait till he should get the boy down to the borders of the brook quite in solitude.

With labour he had compassed the thing he wished. He had made the future safe by the toil of his hands. He was happy, and he blessed God.

Kneeling on the red bricks, with the mountain wind blowing over him, he said to himself:

"I think Pippa must know. The saints are good. They would tell her."

He breathed freely, with a peace and joy in his life that he had not known since the dark night when he had let the dead body drift out to the sea.

A sunbeam came in through a chink in the stone wall, and made a little glow of silvery light upon the pavement where he knelt. He thought it was Pippa's answer.

He rose with a glad light shining in his eyes.

"We will not work to-day," he said, when the office was over.

Usually he did work after mass.

They went home, and they had coffee and bread. Coffee was a thing for feast days. He

went outside and cut a big cluster of yellow Muscat grapes, growing on his south wall, which he had left purposely when he had taken all the others off the vine for market.

He laid them on Signa's wooden platter.

"They are for you," he said. "It is fruit for a prince."

Signa wanted to share them with him, but he would not. He lighted his pipe and smoked, sitting on the stone bench by his door under the mulberry. Under his brows he watched the boy, who leaned against the table plucking his grapes with one hand, and with the other making figures with a pencil on paper.

Signa's lithe, slender limbs had a girl's grace in them; his shut mouth had a sweet sereneness; his drooped eyelids had a dreamy sadness; his lashes shadowed his cheeks; his hair fell over his forehead; he was more than ever like the Sleeping Endymion of Guercino.

But he was not asleep. He was awake; but only awake in a world very far away from the narrow space of four walls in which his body was.

"You look like a picture there is in the city," said Bruno, suddenly, who had stalked through the Tribune as contadini do. "The lad in it has the moon behind him, and he dreams of the moon, and the moon comes and kisses him—so Cecco, the cooper, said—and never of another thing did the boy think, sleeping or waking, but of the moon, which made herself a woman. Is the moon behind you? You look like it."

Signa raised his head and his long dusky lashes; he had not heard distinctly; he was intent upon the figures he was making.

"I have never seen the city," he said, absently; "never since I used to run in, when I was little, after Baldo's donkey."

"What are you doing there?" said Bruno, looking enviously at the pencil; he was envious of all these unknown things, which he always felt were so much better loved by the boy than ever he was or would be himself.

Signa coloured to his curls.

"I was writing—music."

"Write music! How can you write a thing that is all sound? You talk nonsense."

"I think it is right," said Signa, wistfully. "Only I cannot be sure. There is nobody to tell me. Gigi thinks it is correct—but impossible. He thinks no one could ever play it. I can play it. But then I hear it. That is different."

"Hear the paper? You get crazed!" said Bruno. "Dear—you get too old to dream of all this nonsense. Your Rusignuolo is a pretty toy enough, and you play so that it is a joy to listen to you. That I grant. But it is a childish thing at best, and gets no man his bread. Look at the old beggar Maso who wanders about with his flute. Music has brought him to that pass."

"The beggar Maso says that men, by music, have been greater than kings," murmured Signa, with his eyes dropped again on his score.

"Then he lies, and shall get a crust at this door no more," said Bruno, in hot haste.

For the world was a sealed book to him, and music a thing universal but of no account, like the meadow-mint that sweetened the fields; a thing of a shepherd's pipe, and a young girl's carol, and the throats of villagers at Passion

week masses, and the mandolines of lovers and merrymakers going home on S. Anna's Eve through the vines after dance and drink.

Signa sighed, and bent his head closer over his paper. He never disputed. He was not sure enough of the little he knew.

"You like it better than the grapes," said Bruno, with vexed irritation. He had saved the grapes two months and more with the thoughts of Signa's pleasure in them always at his heart. It was a little thing—a nothing. But still—

Signa folded up his paper and ate his grapes, with a flush almost of guilt on his face. All his soul was in the concerto that he was writing.

He had found his own way through the secrets of composition by instinct—for genius is instinct, only a higher and stronger form of it than any other. The sacristan knew a little—a very little; but that little had been enough to give the boy a key to the mysteries of the science of sound.

Who can think that Raffaelle would have been less Raffaelle, even though Sanzio had been a breaker of stones, and Perugino a painter of signs?

Genius is like a ray of the sun :—from what it passes through, it will take its passing colour; but no pollution of air, of water, no wall of granite, no cloud of dust, no pool of mire, will turn it back, or make it less the sunray.

Bruno blamed himself that he should have said a hasty word. The fire ran off his tongue unawares. When all his heart and mind were full of the boy, he felt impatient to see that blank paper—those dots without meaning—raised in rivalry with him, and outstripping him.

"Dear," he said, very gently, and putting his hand on Signa's shoulder; "come down to the brook with me, will you? I have something to say; and I talk best in the air, though talk is no great trick of mine at the best."

Signa rose obediently—he always obeyed. But, by sheer habit, he reached down the Rusignuolo from the top of the chest.

Bruno saw, and his brows drew together.

"Always that thing!" he thought; but he said nothing.

They went out into the air.

The little brook was brimming from the autumn

rains: it is these little brooks that bring about the great floods. The reeds and rushes were blowing merrily: no one cut them this time in the year. Red-breasted chaffinches were bathing and chirping. Fir-apples were tossing down in the ripples. The grass was bright with the cups of the autumn anemones, in all colours. Robins were singing in the olives; and, higher, a cushat cooed.

Bruno stopped and looked at it all, with a smile in his eyes;—a smile proud and full of peace.

"Sit here, dear," he said, pushing the boy gently down on a large boulder of brown stone.

He remained standing still, with always the same look in his eyes.

He laid his hand on Signa's shoulder. His voice, as he spoke, was low, and very soft.

"It is sixteen years to-day since I found you by your mother. She had her arm round you. You had your mouth at her breast. She was dead. It was the night of the great flood. Sixteen years ago, dear. You must be seventeen now; for they said—the women who knew

—that you looked a year old, or more, that night."

"Yes?"

Signa lifted his head and listened. All this he knew, and it had always a certain sharp pain for him.

"Yes," said Bruno, and paused a moment. "Sixteen years. The first nine went all wrong. But I thought I did well. I think Pippa sees you now—and is content—and quite forgives. You are a pure, good, frank boy, and fair to look at; and have no fault, if one may say so of any mortal thing. God knows I do not speak in idle praise; no, nor in vanity. You are as nature made you. But your mother would be glad. Now, dear, listen. When one is seventeen, one is not a child any more: one begins to labour for oneself, to think of the future! At twelve I was more a man than you are now, indeed; but that —so best—so best—so best! Keep young. Keep innocent. Innocence does not come back: and repentance is a poor thing beside it."

Signa listened, with earnest upraised eyes, his feet hanging in the fast, brown water, the

violin lying by him amongst the anemone flowers and the brown plantain stems.

"I have been tormented for your future," said Bruno. "Yes; very often. For if I die to-morrow, I have thought, what would become of you?—and I had nothing to leave! And you—oh, you labour well and cheerfully for me, dear. I do not mean that; but for others, there are stronger lads, and hardier; and who like field toil more, and do not dream at all. And you do dream—too much. I have been tormented often, when I have been roofing the stacks, and have thought—just a fall and a blow on the head for me, and where would the lad find a home?"

Signa laid his cheek against the hand that rested on his shoulder—a long, brown, sinewy hand, good to grasp a weapon or wield a flail.

"For you see," went on Bruno, his eyes shining as they glanced down on the boy's face, and then at the old olive trees and the brown fields corn-sown, "while that treacherous beast was draining me, I could hardly keep myself together; much less could I well lay by for you. A few francs in an old bag, at the end of a

year, that was all, do what I would. But I had often looked at these three fields and the olives. If I could get them for my own, I thought; but it was hopeless. What could I do, with that snake coiling and sucking always, and all his brood? But when I got you safe that day, away from the Lastra and Lippo, and I was all my own master, then I said to myself—It is possible, just possible! So I went first to the fattore, and got his consent, and showed him my plans, and he had nothing against them; and then I went down into the city and saw Baccio Alessi. Oh, you do not know. That is the ass who let the thistles he ought to sup off choke up all this good soil. I went straight in to Baccio—the fool was gilding a frame—and I put it straight before him: all I would give and do. I found he was half willing to sell; wanted three thousand francs—for me, he might as well have said three millions! I could not get it anywhere, even Savio would not lend it, though I would have worked it out—somehow. But I laid my plan before Baccio; we both cunning as rats, and slow and sure; and at last we came to terms, hammering away at

them for days and days. I was to have the land to farm, in the way that seemed best to me; and I was to give him half I got off it for ten years, and two hundred and fifty francs a-year as well, paid monthly; and at the end of the ten years the ground was to be mine—mine—mine!"

Bruno stopped; his breath came quickly; his hand tightened on the boy's shoulder.

Signa looked up, listening; but calmer than Bruno had fancied he would be. To him it was such a gigantic thing, and so marvellous; he wondered the boy could hear it and keep so quiet and sit so still.

"You know all I have done to the land," he pursued. "You can see. You are farmer enough to judge that, my dear. But I have never neglected anything on the old soil—no—Savio says that. He is quite content that it is as it is. He praises me to the padrone; only the padrone is so gay, and young; it is no matter to him. Now when that fool Baccio yonder saw what his half became, and all I got out of his ground, he was for being off his bargain. Of course. But I have him tight, hand and seal, and

good testimony to it. A Tuscan is no bird to catch with chaff. He was grieved in his soul, I can believe, when he saw all the land would give. But that of course was no business of mine. Now this last summer—the saints are good to one—Baccio, who is a shiftless dolt, and leaks on all sides like a rust-eaten pipkin, got deeper and deeper into his troubles, and was as well-nigh being sold up by his creditors as a man can be to keep head above water at all. Now, dear, you have never been stinted for anything? No? You have had all the food you wished for, and all the leisure time you wanted, and I do not think you have ever had a narrow measure of anything? Nevertheless, I saved money. When Savio had taken his dues, and Baccio had had his month's portion, I was always able to put away something in that old copper pot, that I slip in the chimney, where nobody ever would look for it; not even a magpie. So, when I heard the fool was so nigh his rope's end, I counted my money. I had six hundred francs, and there were two years to run under Baccio. I went down and saw him. I told him I would give him

the money down if the land were made mine at once. The poor devil sprang at the chance. He thought the money would help him over the bog of his debts; and he knew in a month or two, if I did not have his bit of land, the creditors would take it, and divide it between them. So he asked nothing better than to do what I wished. He had lost the courage to higgle. I paid him the money down on the nail, and the notary made the ground over to me, for ever and ever. Do you understand, dear? It is mine!"

Signa smiled up in his eyes.

"How glad I am—if you are glad!"

"If I am glad!"

Bruno looked at him bewilderedly. Was the lad stupid or blind, that he did not know—that he did not guess? and with those three fair fine fields of wheat, and those good olives round him in the sun as plain and as fair to be seen as the gold disc round the head of the Gesu child on the altars?

"Glad!" he echoed; "be glad for yourself, too, dear. Do you not understand? What is mine is yours. I have worked the land for you.

It shall be your inheritance, Signa. No, rather, when you are of age, my dear, I shall make it over to you, in your own name, and then you will be your own master, Signa. Your own master—do you understand?"

Signa sprung up and threw his arms round the man's brown neck.

"You are so good—so good! To care for me like that; to think so much; to work so hard. Oh! what can I do in answer?"

Bruno was silent. He was always ashamed of emotion, and he was vaguely disappointed. What the boy felt was gratitude, not joy; not, in any way, the great enraptured pride of possession, which Bruno had expected would have filled his young heart to overflowing.

For seven years he had toiled night and day, and denied himself all rest of the body, or pleasure of the senses, that he might make this one portion of mother earth his own. And now, the boy loved him for his love indeed; but for the gift—did he care for it? Not so much as he did for the gift of a blank sheet of paper to scrawl signs on. Not one tithe as much as he had

cared for the gift of the old brown wooden Rusignuolo.

He put Signa gently away from him, and sat down also by the side of the singing brook.

"You do not quite understand," he said, and his voice had a changed sound in it, and his throat felt dry. "Dear, you are seventeen, as I said, and it is time to think of the future. Now that is why having this land makes me so much at peace. Do you not see? It will be all your own; and on it alone a man could live. Oh, yes, live well, if we build up a little house on it, and the stones lie so near hereabouts, and Savio would get me leave to take them, and there is a brambly corner there by the last olive. But that is not what I am thinking of; I daresay I shall live to be old; I am tough as an ox; and threatened men never die, they say, and so many would like to stick a knife in me; still, anything may happen. And now, what I mean is this: this land shall be yours, your own entirely, as fast and as sure as the notaries can bind it; and then, when I do die, you learning to be a good husbandman, and having all the produce of your

own fields to do as you like with, and so getting to care for the work as you do not yet, because you are so young, Savio will let you stay on in my place in the old cottage, where your mother was born; and you will marry, and have children, and grow a rich contadino—and there is no better life under the sun, no, not anywhere; and so your future is safe, my dear, do you see, and that is why I thank God. Because I have lain awake many an hour, saying to myself if I should die to-morrow, or be killed in a brawl, what would the boy do? But now you are safe, quite safe for all your life long, because you have your own bit of land to live on, and get your bread out of, and that is the sweetest thing that the world holds for any man; and so I bless the saints that they have let me get it for you, and—and I think Pippa knows."

His voice fell low, and he uncovered his dark curly head, and made the sign of the cross on his breast.

The boy kissed his hand—but was quite silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Is it not good, Signa?" said he, after he had borne the silence a little time with no answer but the cooing of the dove in the cranberry bushes.

Signa laid his head against Bruno's arm, as a girl would have done.

"*You* are good!"

"No, I was never that," said Bruno, with some of his old roughness. "But the life for you will be good. The best the world holds—owing nothing to any man, and all to the work of one's own hands and the good black mould that feeds one's hunger all one's years, and covers one's nakedness when one is dead. Ah, dear! I think you are so young you do not see how great a thing it is to set your foot on a bit of the earth,

and say "this is mine!" A king cannot say any more. Only, the king puts dead men into it, and we put the seed that is life."

Signa was silent. He was thinking that he knew a greater thing: to be king in a realm that conquerors cannot assail, in a world that the lives around cannot enter.

He was oppressed and frightened by this, which Bruno had meant should be the crown and joy of his sum of seventeen years. It was as if the weight of the earth bestowed on him was heavy on his heart.

To get rich—to marry—to have children. The common ideal of human kind appalled the pure and lofty fancies of the boy.

To live and die a tiller of the soil, the common lot of the common mortal, terrified the young soul which had believed itself the care of angels.

He felt as if a great chain had been flung round him, fastening him down on to the hill-side. And yet what could he say to this unchangeable unselfish devotion which had thought to benefit him?

He sat and looked at the brown running

water, as it rippled over his feet and the wind blew among the rushes. He loved every rood of the land, and every cloud-mist that floated over it, and every little humble flower that helped to make the soil beautiful; he loved the great dusky pinewoods above his head and the old roofs and towers by the river in the plain far below; he loved the roads he had run on with a baby's feet and the blue mountains that he had worshipped with a poet's heart; he loved them all with passion and fidelity.

And yet this future, of which Bruno spoke as a supreme mercy of heaven, oppressed him with a deadly sense as of imprisonment.

Bruno watched him, and saw nothing of what he felt; he only saw the troubled shadows that had come instead of the cloudless sunshine which he had thought to see dawn on the boy's face. He was struck dumb with amaze—he was mortified to the quick; he was nearer to rage against Signa than ever he had been in all his life.

What could it mean?

He had given the boy a priceless gift—a treasure that moth could not eat nor rust cor-

rupt; he had made safe his future at the cost of seven years of incessant toil and unending self-denial. And this was all—silence! only silence! as though he had said to the child, as Abraham to Ishmael: "Arise, and depart from me."

He had come down to the side of the brook at peace with heaven and all men; he had rejoiced with the pure joys of an unselfish sacrifice and of a duty fulfilled; he had counted for years on the pleasure of this one moment; he had said to himself ten thousand times, ploughing in the rain and wind or rising in the stormy dusk of winter dawns: "How happy the boy will be!—how happy!"

And now the gift was given, and Signa sat silent, watching the brook run by them.

He thought it must be because Signa did not understand.

He spoke again, twisting the rushes to and fro in his right hand.

"Look here," he said; "perhaps you do not see. I think you are not glad. It is strange. What other lad—— Do you know all it means to have a bit of land of your own? You cannot, I think. It

means freedom. You would be a poor man with only this, that I know; but you would never need to starve, and you would be always free. No beggar and no bondsman—always free. Do you understand what that means? You are seventeen. Some day you will see a girl you want. Listen. When Pippa was but a child—not twelve, I think—I loved a woman—not the first I loved, nor yet the last, may heaven be merciful to my sins! but the best—yes, the one I loved the best. The girl was poor, a daughter of many; her father a shepherd up above there. She was called Dina. I think she was not handsome; but she was like a wild rose—yes, just like that; a thing you could not be rough with; a thing that made all the air round her sweet. I loved her best of all. Well, well; you do not know. You will know. If I had married her, all would have gone right. She could keep me from fair and fray, from riot and quarrel, as none of the others ever could. I would have married her. But I was one among many, working on the same soil. My father said, 'How bring another mouth, when there was not enough for the mouths there were?

There was not room for a mouse the more in the old house.' Dina had nothing but the poor rough shift and gown she wore. He would not hear of it; so I never married Dina. We met by stealth up in yon pines. We loved each other. Trouble came. You are too young. Never mind. Dina died of it in the end, a year later—that was all. And there was no soft little white soul between mine and the devil any more. I let myself go to all the evil that chose to come in my path. I stabbed and cursed and gambled and rioted, and made men afraid of me and women rue me. If I had married Dina—I never saw any other woman that I cared to marry; nay, I would have given none the place that ought to have been Dina's. Sometimes I go up and look at where she lies still, in that little square place with the white walls round it, right up there under the pines, where you see the cloud now—that cloud that has come down and past the mountain. Yes, up there. Sometimes I can feel her arms about my throat, and feel her kiss me still. I never think of any of the others. But you do not understand. What I meant to say

was, if I had had a little piece of land like this, and had not been one amongst so many, I should have married Dina, and she might not have died. God knows, at least, I should not feel it in the way I feel it now, that it was I who brought her death on her; and I should have lived with cleaner soul and straighter steps, I think. Now you, dear, you are a gentle boy, and tender of nature, and will love some girl more innocently than ever I did. And when we have built your little house,—just see how it will stand, with the sunrise always in face of it, which will please you so; and that curve of the hill to keep it from the northerly storms,—why, then, I say, you can bring home any honest, pretty maiden that you take a fancy to, and need not ask my will nor anyone's, but can live God-fearing and wholesomely all your days, instead of being cast adrift on lame chances and blind passions. For you are not very strong, my boy, and a tranquil life will be the best for you; and then, when death does come to you, and you see your mother face to face at last, why, then you will say to her that I kept you out of hell, though I could not keep

myself. And I shall not mind hell, dear. No! let it burn me as it may, if only they leave me just a little light, so that I can look up and see you happy by God's throne—you and my poor Dina. A man can be a man in hell, I think."

His voice ceased.

What he spoke of was no metaphor to him, but dark dread truth, as sure to come to pass as night to follow day.

Signa looked, half fearfully, up into his face. What could the boy say?

He only vaguely understood all that the strength and the weakness, the sternness and the tenderness, the force and the frailty of this man's soul wrestled with and overthrew. He only felt the dead weight of a future that appalled him, being forced on him by the hands that were stretched out to give him blessing.

A bitter sense of his own cruel thanklessness, and of his impotence to make himself more thankful, choked up in his heart all other emotions.

He was mute a little while, his chest heaving

and his eyes burning with an insufferable shame of his own ingratitude. Then all at once he threw up his head, and spoke with the desperate pain of one who feels himself most utterly unworthy, yet is carried out of himself by the force of a passion stronger than his will.

"What can I say?" he cried. "Oh, how good you are to think so of me and never once of yourself! And any other boy—oh, yes, I know—any other than I would be so happy and so proud. You must hate me, because I am so thankless, No—not thankless in my heart. Most thankful—only it is not what I want. It sounds so vile to say so; and you toiling and saving, and thinking only of me and of my future all those years. But one is as one is made. You know the rose could not live the water-life of the rush, the dove could not burrow in the moss and sand like the mole. We are as we are made. We cannot help being rose or rush, dove or mole. Something does it for us—God they say. Only one wonders. You must hate me, so cold as I seem, and so base and so callous; and you thinking only of me all these years, and

giving up your life for mine. But it is better to tell you the truth, and you will try and forgive it, because I cannot help it. It is stronger than I am. I do not want any land nor any girl. I do not want to be a contadino always, living and dying. I should do no good. I love this hillside—ah, dearly! I would spend all my life upon it. But then not in the way you wish. Only when I should have learned all I want, and should come home here for ever and ever, and watch the sunrise, and make music all day long that should go away to all the ends of the earth and take the name of Signa with it, and make it great everywhere in men's mouths. But to stay here now and always—never knowing anything, never hearing a mass sung, nor a cantata played, nor an opera given; never doing anything except put the grain in and reap it, and dig round the olives and trim them—oh, I would rather you would throw me in the brook, and fling stones on me till I should be dead. When I take the cattle out, I do not think of them—I think of the music that is always about me, all around me, everywhere. I love the land, but it is because of its

beauty I love it; of ploughing and weeding, and watering, and stacking—I help you because I ought to do it; but my heart is not in my body while I do do it. My heart is with the birds, with the clouds, with the stars—anywhere—but never in the labour at all. If I were alone here in other years, as you say, I should let the briars and the rosemary eat it all up as Baccio did. Oh listen, do listen, and do not be angry. What I want to do is to learn; to hear beautiful things, and see if I cannot make more beautiful things myself. I have heard that there are schools of music, where one can know what one is worth. I play the old great things the great masters wrote, and when I play them, then my heart is in my body, and my soul seems to live in my hands. I cannot help it. The only thing I care for in all the world is music, and I do think that God has meant me to give my life to it for the world. You remember what that stranger said when I sang to him when I was only a child. I do not want my mouth to drop pearls. I do not want gold, or pleasure, or comfort. But if I could go away where I could learn. I have

written—but I do not know what it is worth. If I could go away where I could hear great things, and study them, then I think I could make you proud of me—then I think I could honour the Lastra. Oh, listen, listen, listen! I am not thankless, indeed. But what I want is to have the beautiful things that I hear live after me. I would die a thousand deaths, if it were possible, so that only I could give life to them, and know that the world would say, 'He was only a little lad—he was only Signa—but his music was great.' "

Then his voice ceased quite suddenly, and he dropped his face on his hands and trembled. For he was afraid of the fruit of his words; and his unthankfulness made his soul black and loathsome in his own sight.

At the first phrase Bruno had sprung to his feet, and had all the while stood looking down on him, not breaking in upon him by a breath or by a sign. Only over his face there had come the old darkness that had been banished so long; his eyes under the straight black line of his brows had the old murderous fire in them.

He listened to the end.

Then he set his heel on the violin which laid on the sedges at his feet, and stamped it down again and again as if it had been a snake.

"Accursed be the toy that has bewitched you —accursed the gold that bought it, and the man that gave——!"

The bruised wood cracked and broke under his heel; a single string snapped with a shrill, sad, shivering sound, like the cry of some young thing dying. The boy sprang erect, his fair face in a blaze of wrath and horror, his slender hands clenched. For a moment they looked at one another;—a sullen gloom set in the man's flaming eyes; a wild reproach and a hopeless defiance in the boy's.

Then Signa's arms dropped, and he flung himself on his ruined treasure—covering it with kisses—weeping as girls weep.

Bruno looked down on him, and the fierce scorn on his face deepened, and he laughed aloud.

Mourn in despair for a broken plaything, and slay without thought a love that would burn in hell through all eternity to serve him!

Without a word he turned and went up the mountain-side.

The boy lay face downwards in the grass, sobbing, with the shattered wood under his quivering lips.

Bruno never looked back.

CHAPTER IX.

It was night when Signa crept back from the side of the brook to the house.

The sun had left a stormy red over the mountains. In the valley it was raining heavily. Wind blew from the west. The bells were ringing for the benediction through the dense violet-hued vapours.

The poor peasant who most often aided Bruno on his fields was putting up the bar before the oxen's stable.

He turned his lanthorn to the boy, and nodded.

"You will be up by dawn, Signa—will you? It is too much for me to do alone."

The boy stopped, shading his face from the lanthorn lest the man should see his swollen eyelids and his pallid cheeks.

"Is Bruno gone?" he asked.

"Yes. Did you not know? But, there; he never says anything. It is his way. How your voice shakes. You have got a chill. Yes. He came down from the mountains an hour ago and told me he should be away a day—two days; perhaps more;—would I sleep in the house and see to the things? No offence. But you are no more than a baby. Mind, the guns are loaded; and leave the wine where I can get it easy if you go to bed."

Signa locked himself in his little room, heeding neither the guns nor the wine.

All night the rain beat against his lattice and the winds raged over the roof. All night he tried by the light of a feeble little lamp to mend his shattered Rusignuolo.

It was quite useless. The wooden shell he could piece together well enough; but the keys were smashed beyond all chance of restoration, and for the broken silvery strings there was no hope.

The Rusignuolo was mute for evermore. As mute as a dead bird.

Signa never slept, nor even undressed. He sat looking at the violin with a sick dead apathy of pain.

He watched by it as a living bird will watch by the dead one which has been its comrade in song and flight, and never more will spread wing with him or praise the day beneath the summer leaves.

When the morning came and the peasant flung a shower of pebbles at his shutter to rouse him, he was still sitting there, tearless and heart-broken, with the fragments of the Rusignuolo before him.

The habits of his life were strong enough to make him rise and dip his head in water and shake his hair dry, and go down and help the man in his stable and field work. But, first he laid the violin reverently, as though he buried it, in a drawer, where his rosary and his communion ribbon and his book of hours and his little locket were all laid with sprigs of fir and cypress and many rose leaves to keep them sweet. His face was very white: he had a scared, appalled look in his eyes, and he hardly spoke.

The peasant asked him if he had seen a ghost in the night?

Signa shook his head; but he thought that he had heard many—ghosts of his silent melodies, ghosts of his dead dreams, ghosts of all the gracious, precious, nameless, heaven-born things that he and the Rusignuolo together had called to them from the spirit-world; from the shadows and the storms, from the stars and the sun.

The long, dreary, dull day dragged out its weary length. It had ceased to rain, but the valley was hidden in vapour. He could not see the river or the villages, or the distant gleam of the golden cross. Dusky mists, white and grey, floated along the face of the mountains, and rose like a dense smoke from the plains.

He helped the peasant all the day, his own peasant training teaching him by instinct to labour whilst he suffered. He fed the beasts and plucked up the beet-root, and drew water and stacked wood, and did whatever the man told him to do.

No one came near. The hillside was still as a grave. The fog drifted beneath it, and

hid the rest of the world. He and the man worked on alone. The oxen lowed in the byre, missing their master. The screech-owl finding it so dark began to hoot. A great awe, like that of the sight of death, weighed upon Signa.

He feared every thing, and yet he feared nothing.

The Rusignuolo was ruined and voiceless.

It seemed to him as if the end of the world had come.

He went up the stairs and looked at it often. No tears would come to his eyes; but his heart felt as if it would burst.

Never again would it speak to him.

Never!

A dull aching hatred of the man who had done this evil rose up in him. Hatred seemed like a crime—after all that he owed to Bruno; but it was there.

He was unutterably wretched.

If there had been anyone he could have spoken to, it might have been better; but the only thing that had ever understood him was dead—lying mute and broken amongst the rose leaves.

He could only work on silently with his heart swelling in him, and let the horrible grey hours come and go.

The peasant wondered fifty times, if once, where Bruno could be gone. Bruno, who, for forty-nine years, never had set foot off his own hill and valley, save that once to the sea.

But Signa answered him nothing. He did not care. He did not ask himself. If Bruno were dead—the Rusignuolo was dead. It would be only justice.

The boy's heart was cold and numb.

The Rusignuolo was dead, and all his hopes and all his dreams and all his faiths dead with it.

"Why did he take me out of the flood?" he thought, as he looked down into the dull vapours of the great rain-clouds that hovered between him and the plain.

There is a silence of the mountains that is beautiful beyond all other beauty. There is another silence of the mountains that is lonely beyond all other loneliness.

The latter silence was about him now with the world of water and mist at his feet; that dim white

grey world in which he might have drifted away with his mother—but for Bruno.

"Why did he save me, then?" he thought. "If he must kill all that is worth anything in me now?"

And his heart grew harder against Bruno with each hour that went by, and brought the wet, oppressive, sullen evening round again, with the wind loud amongst the pines.

The boy looked out through the iron bars of his open lattice into the cold still night, full of the smell of fallen leaves and fir-cones. The tears fell down his cheeks; his heart was oppressed with a vague yearning, such as made Mozart weep, when he heard his own Lacrimosa chanted.

It is not fear of death, it is not desire of life.

It is that unutterable want, that nameless longing, which stirs in the soul that is a little purer than its fellow, and which, burdened with that prophetic pain which men call genius, blindly feels its way after some great light, that knows must be shining somewhere upon other worlds, though all the earth is dark.

When Mozart wept, it was for the world he could never reach—not for the world he left.

With the morning Palma came up; the same weather lasted, but weather did not matter to her. She came for sticks and gorze for her firing, which she could glean above on the wild ground. Usually Signa helped her. Now he murmured that he had too much to do, and let her go up under the trees alone in the falling rain.

What was Palma to him, or any living thing? the Rusignuolo was ruined.

He sat on the low stone wall with the rain on him, and left all his work undone.

The absence of Bruno weighed on him with a vague sense of misfortune and fear, and yet he did not wish him to return; he wished him to keep away—always, always, always, he thought: how should he bear to see the man who had slain his Rusignuolo, and how could he ever avenge it on the man who had given him bread and shelter and love, and almost life?

The boy's heart was sick with sorrow, and the first bitterness of wrath that had ever found resting-place in him.

He wished that he were dead—he wished that he had never lived.

Palma came down from the higher ground under the pines, with a sack of fir-apples on her shoulders, and a great bundle of dry boughs and brambles balanced above it on her head. Her feet were black with the moss and the mud; her wisp of a skirt was clinging to her, wet through; her brown face was warm with work. She stopped by the wall.

"Is anything the matter?"

Signa shook his head; he could not speak of it.

"Cippone told me Bruno was gone away," she said, meaning the man in the field: 'Is that true?'"

"Yes, it is true."

"Then there must be something."

Signa was silent; sitting on the wall with his wet hair blowing about him.

Palma rested her sack and her faggot on the stone parapet, and looked anxiously in his averted face.

"Dear Signa, do tell me."

"It is nothing," said Signa, slowly; "only he is a brute—he kills what is greater than himself; and I hate him."

"Oh, Signa!"

The girl's sunburned cheeks grew ashen: the slowness and coldness of his answer frightened her more than any outburst of wild grief or rage would have done. It was so unlike him.

"I hate him," said Signa. "Palma, see here. He pretends to love me, and he breaks my Rusignuolo, and he breaks my heart with it; and he thinks he loves me, both body and soul, because he buys a bit of land and bids me live on it all the days of my life, and dig, and sow, and plough, and hew, and draw water, and lead a life like the oxen's—no better: he calls that love. To do with me exactly what he wishes himself! To make a mule of me—a mule—a stupid plodding thing, mute as the stones: he calls that love."

"Oh, Signa!"

She could say nothing else. She was so amazed and so aghast, that all her love of the soil as a Tuscan, and all her instincts of class and of custom as a peasant, were roused

in horror at him. Only she was so fond of him. She could not think him wrong. She had a true woman in her—this poor brown girl, who went half naked in the wind, and bore her burdens on her back like any beaten ass.

"'Oh, Signa!'" echoed the boy, impatient of her tone, tossing his wet hair out of his eyes. "Oh; no doubt you think my gratitude is as poor as his love. No, it is not. If it had been anyone else,—I am only seventeen, and not strong, they say, but I would have found some way to kill what killed my Rusignuolo. Oh, I know he took me out of the flood—off my dead mother's breast, and has been good—very good, and I have loved him. But now, because I cannot promise him to live as he lives; because I cannot choke the music out of me; because I want to go away, and see whether what I do is worth anything or worth nothing, because I feel I could be great as Gigi says that Paësiello, and Palestrina, and Pergolese were; now he turns against me, now he is a brute, now he breaks the violin under his heel as if it were an empty husk of maize! And then he calls that love; and

you look at me in horror, as if I were some heartless thing because I would sooner any day have my lute than such a love as that;—to set its foot upon my throat and keep it mute, as the kite sets his claw into the thrush's!"

He spoke with vivid, tremulous, petulant passion; the first passion that had ever convulsed the tender, dreamful youth of him; all the colour flushed back into his face, his mouth quivered, his eyes flashed fire through the rain.

Palma listened with a great terror in her. But she was a brave girl, and swift to reason and to see the right.

"Is your gratitude so much more real than his love?" she said, quickly; and then was sorry that she had said it, fearing it too harsh.

Signa winced a little, struck home by a sudden consciousness.

"You cannot buy gratitude," he said, angrily. "I *was* grateful, heart and soul, and I would have died for him two days ago. But now, he has forfeited all that. I hate him—I hate him, I tell you!"

"Does a moment's rage outweigh sixteen years' care so soon?"

"He broke the Rusignuolo," said Signa; and his fair mouth, set with a stern serenity, gave him for the moment almost the look of manhood.

Palma looked at him, and thought how beautiful his face was; her eyes filled with tears.

"What do you want?—To go away?"

"To go away now, that I may come back great."

"Are people happier that are—what you call great?"

"Happy! that I do not know; perhaps not. I daresay not. What does that matter? It is not to have lived in vain. Not to be put under the sod like a dead horse. Not to be forgotten while there are men on the earth. It is to do the thing one has it in one to do; to see the sun always while other people stare at the dust. It is—it is—oh what is the use of talking. You never would know; you never understand."

"No, dear," said Palma, with a sigh; "and what does Bruno want of you?"

"To live as he does. To be a contadino

always. He has bought that bit of land for me by the brook, you know it; he would give it me for my own; and when I am a man I am to live there, and take some girl as my wife, and so be safe, as he calls it, and happy, as he thinks! That is what he has laid out for me. That is what he wants."

Palma coloured to the roots of her dusky rippling hair, and then grew very pale, as pale as her olive skin could be.

"And all that does not please you?"

"Please me! Oh, Palma, when one has the song of the angels always in one's ears!"

His mouth trembled, his voice faltered; how could he say what was in him; the force greater than himself that drove him on? the futile despair at his own powerlessness to alter his fate, which made him heartsick at this future, which they all thought so fair?

Palma did not understand. A sickly pain settled over her; a sense of isolation and of immeasurable distance from the other life which had grown up with her own amongst the flowers of Giovoli.

Besides, to have a bit of land, and dwell on it and die on it; that seemed to her, as it had seemed to Bruno, the very sum and crown of human desire.

The "sublime discontent" which stirred in the young soul of Signa was as far from any range of her vision as were the angels' songs he said he heard.

She believed in the angels indeed; but for her they were mute. For her they ever abode beyond the great white clouds, invisible and silent.

She did not speak for a little time. Then she rose, and left her sack and her faggot on the wall.

"It is true, dear. I do not understand. I am stupid, I dare say. I will just go in and see if there is anything to do in the house. I can stay a very little while. I have everything to do at home. Father is so busy taking the lemons indoors."

Signa let her go. He was looking through the still falling rain at the mountains, where he could no longer see the sunrise, and at the plain where the golden cross was still behind the mist.

When he had had the Rusignuolo with him, he had never cared whether there were rain or sun.

Palma went into the house, and, like the laborious and cleanly creature that she was, found much to do with broom and pail and duster; made a fire underneath the cold soup-pot, cut fresh vegetables into it, and scoured out the pots and platters of the daily use which were lying foul about the place. She was accustomed to such work, and could get through it quickly.

She worked hard and fast, the tears swimming in her eyes all the while. She did not know very well what ailed her. She only knew that Signa wanted to go away. That the life, which seemed so natural and so good to them all, was a thing impossible to him.

She loved him better than all her brothers; and it had hurt her curiously to hear him talk with such scorn of the little house that Bruno would have built for him on the hill by the brook, and of the girl that in time might have dwelt with him there in face of the great glad sunrise.

It was not that she thought she could have been chosen to be that girl—oh, no!—never-

theless it hurt her with a dull and confused pain. Besides, she felt that he was wrong; and she did battle with herself whether she ought or ought not to tell him so.

She decided to tell him. Signa seemed to her sturdier, stronger, lower nature, like some beautiful, delicate shy song-bird, that a rough word would scare and drive away like a shower of stones. He was so unlike them all. To Palma, who only saw her cabbages, and her broom, and her water-bucket, those eyes of his, which were always looking upward, and seeing such beautiful things in the clouds and the sunbeams, seemed like those of a young saint.

If the church had made him "beato" she would not have been astonished; she would have worshipped him honestly, and besought his intercession with that God whom he was always so near.

And, yet, now she knew he was in the wrong, and she wrestled with herself, scouring out the metal pans, whether it were her bounden right to tell him so, or whether she might without cowardice hold her peace. And perhaps he

would only laugh her to scorn; she knew she was stupid, except just for this rude hand labour, and that she knew nothing at all, not even her letters all through; and that she had never seen anything except this green hill and the walls of the Lastra;—while Signa knew so much—so much!—and had been as a child to the city and to the sea, and now could tell one so many things about the old walls that for him had tongues, and the ways of the birds and the beasts on the mountains; and had read all the lives of the saints, and could see right away into heaven when he had the dream-look in his eyes—so she thought.

Nevertheless, being a brave girl, and with a resolute heart, her conscience would not let her keep mute. When she had done the house up tidily, and even put a new sprig of bay under the Madonna, she went out into the air; the rain had ceased, but the white mist was hanging everywhere. Signa still sat looking down into the vapours of the plain. She touched him timidly.

"Dear, do not be angry with me; but I

want to say one word. I am not clever, I know. But the priest says, when one is very clever one does nót see simple things so straight. I do not know. I want you to think. Of course you can judge better than I. But—do you do rightly by Bruno? He has been so good, and given up so much, and hoped so much: is it not just a little hard that you should be so longing to leave him? Perhaps he does love you selfishly. But is not your want to get away selfish too? He has been cruel. Oh, yes! that is certain. But then no doubt he was in pain: he hardly knew what he did. If I were you, I would try and do what he wishes. Yes, I would. You would have had no life at all if it had not been for him. Is that nothing? I would try if I were you."

Then, afraid of what she had said, and afraid of being late at her home, she took up her sack and her faggots, and went away into the rain-fog, down the rough side of the ploughed land, over the yellow and brown leaves fallen from the vines.

"She does not know. She knows no more

than the mules or the stones know," thought Signa, while she ran on with firm, fast feet, and the boughs like a dark cloud over her head.

Genius lives in isolation, and suffers from it. But perhaps it creates it.

The breath of its lips is like ether; purer than the air around it, it changes the air for others to ice.

The day went on, and Bruno did not return. The peasant pondered and wondered, but had the soup and the wine, and stayed and saw to the fields and the cattle.

Signa wandered up into the woods, and waited there till nightfall. The rain had passed away, but there was no sun.

The brow of the hill is very wild. A great breadth of gorse and myrtle, with huge stones scattered over it, and thousands of sea pines standing bold against the sky. Here in spring and summer the nightingales sing in countless numbers.

He had so often taken his violin up there and played in concert with them, echoing and catching all their notes.

It seemed to him terribly silent now.

Palma's words pursued him into that cool grey silence.

She did not know: she was so stupid: and still she had awakened his conscience.

Conscience and genius—the instinct of the heart and the desire of the mind—the voice that warns and the voice that ordains: when these are in conflict it is bitter for life in which they are at war; most bitter of all when that life is in its opening youth, and sure of everything and yet sure of nothing.

The boy threw himself downward on the wet earth, and leaned his cheek on his hands, and gazed into the dim watery world underneath him, where all the distant towns and the pale villages began to gleam, whitely and faintly, like little clouds on the dark greyness of the plains, and the dull blue and black of the mountains, which rose like ramparts of iron in the east and north.

The girl was stupid—so stupid that every one knew she had never learnt her alphabet even—and yet he felt that here she had seen and had spoken aright. That he felt.

Signa had had few moral teachings in his seventeen years of life.

There is virtue on these lonely hill sides, but it is virtue, self-sown, wind-drifted, like the wild pomegranate bushes, and the wild peach trees.

No one had taught him what was right or wrong, so long as he observed all the rules of the church, and did not blunder against any civil law. So far as he had been told, he had goodness enough to make his peace with heaven. But the boy's own mind had clearness and simplicity in it, and went by instinct to a higher sense of right and wrong than any he had been ever taught—as Palma's did likewise; Palma, who trotted in the mud or dust all her days, and whose brain was all dulled with small cares as with cobwebs.

He knew that she was right.

That he was thankless and selfish; that the hate which throbbed sullenly in him was almost a crime; that a wolf cub, fed and housed and cared for as he had been, would have had more gratitude than he.

He knew that she was right.

That his life ought to be offered to the man

who had done all for it; that his long debt ought to cancel an hour's wrong; that since he had no other way or means of payment save obedience, he should obey—even to the sacrifice of all his dreams, even to the crushing out of all his soul.

He lay chest downward underneath the pines, and gazed into the misty depths below, and felt the hard sharp pain of his consciousness of right gnaw at him with her remembered words. He could see the line of his olive trees and the fields where he was to labour all his life long, facing the sunrise.

He was wise enough to know that he could not have both lives. That as he grew to manhood he must cease to be either peasant or musician; that he must renounce one thing or the other. He had lived too much on the soil not to know the ruthless toll of hours and the ceaseless patience and purpose which the soil, ere it will consent to repay him anything, exacts from the husbandman.

He knew that he must choose, now and for ever.

It was the old common choice between bodily need and spiritual desire; only for him the lower need was the one linked with duty, the higher need was the one linked with sin.

He lay and gazed at the dark fields that were to be his own, and the brook that glimmered like a glow-worm under its dusky rushes. And it had been there that the violin had been broken and all its melody silenced for ever and aye!

It froze his heart against the little spot. He hated that shallow water which could sing on and on and on, where the greater music had been hushed into dumbness.

It seemed like a parable to him.

Just as the violin had been stricken mute there, so would be the powers in him. Just as the silver string had snapt, so would his heart break by that cruel streamlet. He saw himself growing older and older, living on and on, with the music dying in him every day and every year, a little more and a little more.

He saw himself as he would be on that land that looked to the morning light:—spending his breath in shouting call-words to the panting oxen;

spending his strength in sowing and in reaping the sum of his daily bread; touching his lute perhaps at evening with dull tired hands, that others might dance under the olive boughs.

What use would the morning light be to him then? What would it say to him? He would only be able to look on the black earth he turned, as it dawned; he would only grow to loathe the little song birds, awakened by its beams, because they would be free and he never. He lay looking down and thinking and seeing himself thus—as he would be—in all the years to come.

His eyes were dry, his face was calm, the coldness that had frozen about him in the night, when he had watched by his ruined Rusignuolo, never changed. It was as if all his boyhood had perished in him with that lost music.

The struggle was hard in him. All the longing of his soul wrestled with the consciousness of duty which the speech of the girl had stung into life. He knew that he ought to forgive. He knew that he ought to obey. All the earth and all the air around him spoke to him of this man's

exceeding love. He looked down on the river from whose flood it had rescued him. He looked down on the roof under whose shelter it had harboured him. He looked down on the old grey gateway beside whose shadow it had faced calumny and forgiven treachery for his sake. He looked down on the old dark trees beneath whose foliage it had toiled for him in endless labour from daybreak to nightfall, in light and in darkness, through sixteen years.

And he let the blow of a moment's passion sweep it all away as though it had never been. Mighty and enduring as granite, it was to him dissolved in a second of time like an image of snow.

He wrestled with himself for this. He strove against the hardening of his heart. He struggled to change himself; to forgive; to obey.

It was of no use.

With the music from the broken strings, gratitude and affection had passed out of his heart, and left a dead silence there. A silence in which his conscience indeed spoke; but spoke in vain.

When the Ave Maria tolled dully under the mists of the plain, he got up slowly, and went slowly homeward.

His mind was made up: he would not live on in his body slaying his soul.

"He killed the Rusignuolo," he said to himself. "He would kill me."

And he resolved to live his own life; how or where he knew nothing; only by his own means and in his own way, no longer eating the bread of the man who loved him indeed, but who hated his genius, and who wished it to perish.

"What one can do is sweeter and dearer than what anything is," he thought to himself, with the terrible self-absorption of the artist in his art;—terrible,—because ever fore-doomed to die in agony soon or late, under some human passion that avenges the rejection of humanity.

And he went slowly down the hill-side home, losing sight of the brook and the olives, for it had grown quite dark.

The house was silent. The shutters were closed. The dog was mute. He lifted the latch of the door and entered.

There was the glow from a lighted lamp upon the stone of the floor.

In the light stood Bruno.

He came forward and bowed his head before the boy. He said:

"Forgive me."

CHAPTER X.

THAT night, when Signa had gone to his bed of hay, and had fallen asleep there, with the tears left wet upon his lashes, Bruno sat still and lost in thought, with his head sunk upon his breast.

The boy must go.

That was sure. That was plain to him.

Signa had begged to stay and do his will in all things—meaning what he said. Touched into passionate repentance of his own hardness of heart by this noble remorse which had bent the strength of the man before him, he had vowed in uttermost sincerity of purpose to live and die on the hill-side. Bruno, a suppliant before him, had awed and ruled him; as Bruno, a master tyrant over him, never could have done.

When he had been embittering his soul against the love that saved and sheltered him, that love had been returning to him, bringing the fierce, proud, stern soul of the man into supplication before him—him—a child, a debtor, a beggar, an ingrate!

The sharpness of the contrast had stung him to the quick.

At the first words of Bruno he had fallen on his neck in passionate contrition.

His thankless, oblivious, selfish passion had seemed vile to him as a crime.

"Forgive me," Bruno had said.

But the boy had known that the forgiveness needed was for himself.

That passion may be an infirmity of man; but that ingratitude is a curse of hell.

"I will do what you wish," he had vowed, in all the breathless eagerness of his repentance. "I shall be happy—so happy! I will never go away—never, never! Let my foolish dreams die. They are not worth a moment of sorrow or regret to you. I shall be happy here—so happy!"

Bruno had smiled; but it was a smile whose tenderness had half appalled the boy.

"My dear," he had answered; "later we will talk of that. I sinned enough against you; I will try to do right—henceforth."

And when it was midnight, and the boy slept in the little corner chamber with the blessed palm-sheaf above his head, Bruno sat still and pondered—how to do this right.

Passion had mastered him. The old brutal, swift, savage, unthinking rage, which had done so much evil in his day, had burst out like a smothered flame, and for the first time had smitten the living thing in which all his affections and all his atonement centered. When he had struck his heel down on the Rusignuolo, it had seemed to him as if he were crushing out the devil that was tempting the boy from his side into all the evil of the world. All his own great love and uncounted sacrifices had been as nothing beside a plaything of wood, a toy of sound and wind!—it had seemed to him as if he gave a kingdom and got back a stone.

In the fury of his pain, all that was worst in him

had surged up from its long sleep and broken its bonds. He let all the evil in him loose. He went down into the city and plunged into all the licence that he had sternly shunned so long. He came out from the riot of it cooled and in his right mind, like a man who awakes from the heavy sleep of drugs. Three nights had gone by; he hated himself; he thought of the boy without bitterness and with longing; he felt as if he were not worthy to meet the clear eyes of a child.

He went, in the dull grey rain of the afternoon, into a little dark chapel in the oldest quarter of the city, and kneeled down in the black shadow of it, and confessed his sins. It was his duty, he thought; he had been reared so. He believed that he purified his soul.

He was vile in his own sight.

In his remorse, the broken Rusignuolo seemed to him—no less than it had seemed to Signa, mourning it on the hillside—a human thing, with a voice from heaven in it, that he had hurled into death and silenced by a deed as cruel as Cain's.

He went homeward along the familiar road,

with the Ave Maria bells ringing through the fog. As he went, he struggled hard with himself. He hated this madness, as it seemed to him, which had taken possession of the boy. He hated it at once with the jealousy of an affection which beheld in it an irresistible rival, and with the superstitious fear which an uneducated intelligence has of an incomprehensible mental power.

Bruno was of the same stuff as those men who in earlier ages burned the magic out of creatures whom they believed bewitched, and thought the ruthless torture that they dealt a righteous service both to God and man. In his sight, it was a sorcery which enthralled Signa, and made him blind to all the peace and safety and plenty and sweetness of the life upon the hills.

But, with the bating of his fury, the calmness of reason had returned to him. It was a sorcery—that he thought; but it was one which there was no combating—that he saw also. He saw that it would only be possible to stifle it, by destroying the very core of the boy's life.

He might keep his hand on the throat of his

nightingale—true; but, under the pressure, the life would go out with the song.

Though to him this strange absorbing instinct which killed all other was beyond any possible comprehension, Bruno, by the force of his love for the lad, knew that he must let him go, or see him fade away into a hopeless and joyless creature, for ever beating and thirsting to be free.

As he went along the road in the rain which he never felt, under the sound of the bells which he never heard, he thought, and thought, and thought—tearing the selfishness out of his heart with the same haste and rage as in other years he had hurled oaths or stricken steel at those who had offended him.

To do right by the boy.

That had been his first intent, his sole desire, since, driving his cattle out on the day after the flood, he had made his mute promise to dead Pippa.

But, what was right?

He did not know. His reason as a man told him that, the strong instincts of the brain being stifled, the boy would fall into a feeble, worthless,

and unhappy thing. His ignorance as a peasant made him fear, with all a peasant's dread of the unknown and the unseen, the world into which Signa pined to soar away, and the art which usurped all his desires.

Music!—well, what was it? Just a thing that came to every flute-voiced girl carrying her linen to the river's brink, every lithe-fingered shepherd or ox driver who, when his work was done, thrumbed on a mandoline before the cottage door.

This power which took empire over the boy and drove him from all paths of custom and of duty, and made him happy with a few signs upon a piece of paper;—that was beyond all sense and meaning to him;—a horrible exaggeration and distortion of an innocent thing, such as men sent who had the evil eye.

Which would be right?

To burn and stamp this madness out of the young soul?—or to let it have its way and trust to heaven?

If he only knew!——

In the Lastra the lamps were burning. There

was a funeral going through the gates; the bier borne by the brothers of the Misericordia.

Unconsciously, from habit, he stood still and crossed himself, and uncovered his head. When it had passed a thought had come to him.

He entered the church where Luigi Dini was putting out the lights after benediction. Bruno went up to him without greeting.

"Old Maso told the lad men by music have been greater than kings. Is that a lie?"

The old sacristan was used to him, and took no offence.

"It is a truth," he answered.

"Can the lad be great?"

"I think so."

"But is that happiness?"

"No."

"What is the use of it then?"

"It is what is not happy that speaks to men of God. Happy men think of their coffers—of their children—of their bodies—of their appetites: they are content with all that."

"You have known a great man?"

"Never out of books."

"And happy men?"

"Yes; they were three parts fool, and the rest rogue."

Bruno was silent: he wanted to be as God to the lad. He wanted to give him endless daylight and ceaseless peace. He wanted to be his fate; and stand always between him and pain and sorrow and accident and the calamities of earth.

The old man looked up at him, and understood his thought.

"You cannot do it," he said, answering what was not spoken. "It is not given to any life to be the providence of another."

The veins swelled on Bruno's forehead: a heavy sigh broke from him: he was never a man to let another know the thing he felt, but now pain mastered him—the miserable pain of irresolution and uncertainty, and of that sense, beyond all others oppressive, of combating in the dark an unseen and unmeasured force.

He stretched his hands out with an unconscious gesture, as of a blind man seeking guidance.

"Look: you know the boy as well as I.

Better may be. For his soul is dark to me. He is higher than I. It is as when a bird goes up—up—against the sun. You cannot follow it. There is too much light where it is gone. I only want to do the best. For me it does not matter. You see I have got the bit of land for him; the land on the mountain; I have made it good land and rich, and it is a safe provision for him all his days. But, then, when he breaks his heart at thoughts of it, and is crazed to learn and talks of being great—if only I could tell what to do? Perhaps it is a boy's whim, and to do right one should be hard with him and rough, and stamp it out, and seem cruel now, and he would be thankful in a few years' time? And then again, if one made a mistake—if one did the wrong thing—if he sighed and fretted, and wanted what he had not, and were never content, and fell away to feebleness and uselessness—how would one forgive oneself—ever? How can I tell? I do not understand. If, at seventeen, they had said to me, 'There is a bit of good land all for you; all your own, and you beholden to no man, and working all for yourself, and sharing

with no master;' I should have been mad with joy and pride. I should have seen nothing but my corn and my grapes. I should have thought I was better off than anyone else in the wide world. Why should it not be so with him? I do not understand. He is Pippa's boy. He has our blood in him. He should love the soil. He did not get his dreams from Pippa. If one only knew;—for me it does not matter. I will cut off my right hand if that will serve him; if that will keep his soul safe here and hereafter. But what he wants seems madness. Is it a devil that lures him? Or is it an angel calls? How can one know? I want to do the thing that best will serve him. But how to find it? Tell me, if you know. Do not think of me. For me it does not matter."

He ceased, and leaned his hand on the rail before the dark altar on which the last light had just sunk out; the rail shook with the trembling of his strong nerves; his head dropped upon his chest.

The old man looked at him a moment.

"You will be lonely if he go—it is not

fair to you: you have done all for him all his life."

Bruno gave an impatient gesture.

"I say—for me it does not matter. I can live alone. Answer for the boy—as if I were dead, and there were only him to think of—for his good."

"Then I say—let him go."

Bruno was silent. He breathed hard.

"Let him go," repeated the sacristan. "I never knew a great man. No. My path did not lie that way. But I did know one, a man that might have been great. Truly great, I think. It was when I was a lad. He was a little older than I was. He travelled with the first little troop that I belonged to then; singers, and actors, and musicians, all of us, going from town to town as the fairs, and the feasts, and the carnival, and the vintage, fell. You have heard me talk of it. He was the son of a poor organist, and was himself a violin-player, hardly more than a boy, just keeping body and soul together; he played divinely, and he wrote beautiful things just as your boy does now. People

would weep to hear him. It was like nothing mortal. He had an old mother, widowed, and a little sister in Perugia. They lived wretchedly. He sent them every coin that he could get. He stinted himself. One night while he was playing he fainted. It was only hunger. Hunger is so common. The world is so full. He used to dream of greatness, just as your lad does. And indeed the things he made were perfect. Only he had so little time; and never had any chance to get them heard. One day he had a letter from his mother. His grandfather, a hard man, who had denounced her for her marriage, had relented and had offered to take home my Claudio into his house and way of business, on condition that he should touch no note of music ever again. The old man was a money-changer and banker in the north, sharp and keen, and hard as any stone. The mother and the little sister implored him; they starved for all that he could do; and here were peace and plenty, only waiting for his will. They wrote and wrote and wrote; then at last they came. They wept, and raved,

and entreated, and reproached. They wore him out; he yielded. 'It will kill me,' said Claudio. 'But if it must be—for them——' That night he burned all he had ever written. It was to him worse than any murder. He believed that he killed his soul. He suffered hideously. Death seemed to pass over him as the flame took his music. 'No one will ever hear it now,' he said. And he smiled. I suppose they smile like that in hell, thinking of what they have to see, and of the heaven they will never see. He went. The mother and the little sister were happy. They had enough, and more than enough. 'Claudio will be a rich man,' they said to me. They rejoiced in their success. They thought they had done rightly for him as well as happily for themselves. When a year and a little more had gone by I got a message begging me to go to Claudio in Trieste. I was with a theatre in Verona at the time. I did not know how to do it; but I felt that I should never see his face again unless I hastened. I crossed the sea. I found him dying. 'I did my best,' he said to me. 'Indeed I did my

best. But I died when they killed the music in me. My body has dragged on a little longer, but I died then.' Then he asked them to let me sing to him; he had kept his vow; he had never played or heard one note. The mother and the sister were there weeping. The old man said, 'Yes: he may have what he will now.' I sang to him—as men have sung masses burning at the stake. For I loved Claudio. The dying life flamed up in him as he heard. It came back for one moment into his veins, into his eyes, into his soul. He raised himself with such a look upon his face—ah! such a look; if there be angels indeed they must look so!—and he lifted his voice, and sang with all the strength and beauty of his youth returned to him, the Eterno Genitor, the chant that Metastasio died singing. One moment—but a moment, so it seemed—the glory of the song brought his life back. Then his voice dropped—all suddenly. His mother raised him. He was dead. The old man cried to heaven to take his gold and give him back the boy. But heaven does not hear these prayers, or will not answer them. They told

me later he had laboured at the desk with patience, and with constant effort; but it had killed him. When the old man had relented, and would have made him free in his own way, it was too late. If you blind a bird you cannot give sight and liberty again; nay, if you beseech God ever so, even He cannot do it. There are things that done, cannot be undone, by God or by man. His mother lived out her days a rich woman. His sister had a large inheritance, and wedded wealthily. But it had been bought with Claudio's life, and who shall say what the world did not lose? That is true. He was my friend. It was fifty years ago—all that. Claudio would be old. But the look that was in Claudio's eyes is in your boy's. And I think—I think—if you keep him here, and deaden his soul in him, that his fate will be too, the same."

Bruno made no answer.

He stood still with his head bent by the side-altar, in the gloom of the church that was only lightened by the brazen sconce that the old man carried in his hand. He had not lost one word; his breath came slowly and loud; he did not

understand: he did not know what it was that this dead lad and this living one loved beyond ease and safety, and friends, and peace, and daily bread. He did not understand one whit the more. But he saw what he must do.

He turned with a heavy sigh like a man who stoops to take up a great burden on his shoulders and walk on with it.

"Good-night!" he said, simply, and he went through the little dark church lost in thought, and out into the starless, misty night.

Luigi Dini went up the wooden stairs into the room where the brethren keep their robes and masks.

"He will let the boy go," he said to himself.

The bell had rung for succour for a peasant who had been flung from a mule-cart on the road going to Sta. Marià; some brethren were busily fastening their cloaks while others got out the black stretcher to go and fetch the wounded man. Amongst them was Lippo, ever foremost in good works.

As Lippo drew the hood over his head he was telling his neighbour how his brother Bruno had

lent money out for several years on hypothec to the poor wretch Baccio Alessi, the gilder, in the city, on the fine little piece of land under Artemino, that ran with what he farmed; and of how poor Baccio, being close driven by unlooked-for calamity, and the cruelty of creditors who had no mercy on a hard-working creature, had been in direst need, and Bruno, seeing good his time, and taking advantage of necessity, had foreclosed and drawn his claim so tightly and so suddenly, that Baccio Alessi had no chance or claim, and so the land had passed to Bruno;——who, as he once had wasted all his substance on evil-living and light women, now would make soup out of pebbles and milk a mill-stone for the sake of his ill-begotten darling whom he had foisted on the memory of poor Pippa.

"He will let the boy go," thought the old man, while Lippo, mourning over his brother's hardness of greed and the poverty of poor Baccio in the city, drew his cowl close and hurried away to help raise the half-dead peasant; and Bruno, solitary and musing, went up into the darkness and the silence of the hills.

"The boy must go," thought Bruno, as he flung his cloak across his mouth against the watery cold, and ascended the sea-road in the teeth of the wind from the northward.

The outer world was a black and empty space to him. The cities were whirlpools of vice, into which the young were caught as in nets. The only life that he could comprehend, or could believe to be of any worth, was the life of the husbandman living and dying under one roof. In the dreams that made the future beautiful to the lad he himself had no belief. In the greatness that the lad aspired to he saw no reality and no excellence; but only a vague dark chimera of folly that would lead down, down, down, into a bottomless abyss.

He had no consolation of hope.

He had no fond simple belief in some impending though unknown good, such as mothers who love their sons without comprehending them, are solaced by when their children leave them.

To him all beyond was rayless, meaningless, comfortless.

He had said truly: he did not understand.

He only knew that the boy would perish here like the dead Claudio; and so must go.

The rest was with the future. The silent, dark, inexorable future, which he burned to tear asunder as Milo tore the oak, and see the heart of it and the secret; no matter what they were.

All he did know was that he himself was nothing in the life that owed him all.

The boy must go:—go to forget the sweet hill-side, the hand that gave him daily bread, the old straight wholesome ways, the old clean simple paths, the old innocent natural affections; go to forget them all; go to get drunk on this strange madness of unrest; go to be possessed of this fever of desired greatness.

Bruno cheated himself with no false faiths.

If the boy went now he went for ever.

His steps indeed might return, but the heart and the youth, and the love of him never. If he went to the world and to fame and to art, these would hold him for ever. Bruno knew none of the three, but this he felt. No baseless hopes, no lingering blindness duped him.

Nevertheless he knew that he must go.

Go, whilst he himself stayed to labour for him, and get out of the soil the means for him to pursue the things he wished, and change his visions into reality if such things ever were done in the world; and keep here roof and house and refuge for him, if so be that he should never find his dreams come true, but should return sickened and bruised with effort and with failure.

The boy must go: this was his own portion; to labour here, and get the gold together that would give this young thing wings.

He did not think of that with any regret.

It was to him natural. He had of late years so bent all his energies and all his endurance into working for the good of the boy, that to continue doing this was nothing that seemed to him either generous or strange. It was what he had always said to himself that he would do for Pippa's son.

So he went home to his hills.

The morrow would be All Souls Day.

It was late in the afternoon. He went out of

his way to the little church of his daily worship.

Vespers were just over. The old priest was in his sacristy. Two or three peasants were coming out. The little, dark church was being hung with veils of black, here and there, by the sacristan; and a woman, who wept as she worked, was putting up some branches of everlasting flowers—her lover had died in the harvest time.

Bruno went into the sacristy, and laid some money down on the table.

"For Pippa's soul—to-morrow!"

The old priest gave him his blessing; he dwelt on the same hillside, and believed in the story of Pippa.

Bruno went out into the twilight.

"She will know I keep faith with her," he said to himself; and then entered his dwelling-house, and stood before Pippa's son, and said—"Forgive me!"

When many hours had gone by, and the boy was at rest, Bruno sat on, with his solitary lamp burning.

He sat motionless while the night waned; not sleeping; wide awake, but half paralysed as a man under gunshot pain.

He was at peace with himself; at least, he had that deep, sad peace—sad as death—which follows the surrender, for another's sake, of all the hope of life.

The calm of a great repentance, and of an unflinching self-sacrifice, were with him. The cold funeral meats wherewith Duty feeds her faithful.

But a great loneliness weighed on him, and closed round him. He felt that he had given a kingdom, and got back a stone.

Like all generous natures, he had poured out his gifts unthinking, ungrudging, and without measure.

His hands were empty, and his heart was desolate.

That was his reward.

It is a common one.

The night wore on; the intense chillness of coming dawn came into the house like ice; the cock crowed from the stable. He rose and went

into the inner chamber, where the boy was; it was only parted by an archway from the common room.

Signa lay asleep, his head upon his arm, his face turned upward. Bruno lowered the lamp, shading it with one hand, so as not to awaken him. Its light fell on his soft young limbs, on his thick lashes, on his beautiful mouth. Bruno looked at him long. Then two great tears gathered in his own eyes, and fell down his cheeks slowly, like the great rain drops that follow storm.

He stood silent for a while; the lad slept on, unconscious; then he set down the lamp, and blew the flame of it out, and, without noise, unbarred his house-door and went into the open air and began his labour for the day.

There was a strong wind blowing from the north. Rain was falling. It was dawn—but dawn without the sun.

He yoked his oxen; and alone and in the darkness he began the day.

CHAPTER XI.

When winter came, Bruno dwelt alone in the old house on the hills; and Signa studied music in the schools of Bologna.

CHAPTER XII.

In the fair bright weather of the spring, when the virgin gold of the daffodils was scattered broadcast everywhere, an old man with white hair and horn spectacles hobbled over the stones by the south gate to the post for a letter, and got it, and went and read it in the shade by the shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel, and then took his way through the Lastra to go across the bridge towards the great hills.

As he went under the west gateway, an old woman put her head out over a window-board that had roses on and some hyacinths not yet in bloom.

"Is he well?" she cried down into the street.

"Quite well," said the old man, looking up; and went on between the budding trees.

Before he reached the bridge, a girl raced down the sloping fields, all green with corn. She had great knots of scarlet windflowers and white snowflakes, that she was tying up for market, in her hands. Her feet were wet, because she had been standing in the brook to get the flowers; she had a pitcher slung at her back; her heart beat so high and her breath came so fast that the lacing of her ragged boddice broke.

"Is he coming back?" she asked, and her great black eyes shone like stars.

"Coming back!—no!" said the old man, with a smile. "He must never come back now, Palma. That would never do."

The girl turned and went away up the fields slowly, letting the snowflakes drop.

The old man went on up the sea-road.

There was the lovely afternoon light everywhere; all the soil was radiant with leaf and blade; the river was a sheet of gold and green shining like the lizards; the air was so clear that on the highest and farthest heights the smallest dwelling gleamed, white as any pearl, and each tree told; near at hand, along the footpaths,

every tuft of grass had the rich ruby and purple of the anemone in it, and the fresh odours of the violet; while the daffodils were tossing everywhere above the short green wheat. But the sacristan looked at none of these things.

He was old.

An hour and more's sturdy laboured walking brought him midway on the great hill, with the stone-pines on its summit, and the blue mountain in its rear. A west wind was blowing sweetness from the firwoods and salt from the sea. A man was at work in the beanfields that ran under the olives.

He straightened his back and looked up, shading his eyes from the sun. Then he saw the open letter, and made an eager stride forward.

"Is he happy?" he asked.

"This is the love that loves best," thought Luigi Dini. And he sat down in the shade.

"Is he happy?" Bruno asked, resting his hand on his hip, under the olive boughs, in the March afternoon.

And the old man answered him truthfully from

the letter that was a sealed book to Bruno, "Yes—he is happy;" and read him what the boy said.

Bruno looked at the piece of paper with longing eyes. He wished that in his own boyhood he had learned to read, instead of wading amongst the canes, and climbing for nests of birds, and scaling convent walls to get the grapes, and romping and dancing with every girl he could whenever a mandolin was playing.

Signa wrote the truth: he was happy.

He had a little room in the roof. He heard the clanging of the coppersmiths' hammers all day long. He missed the freedom of the hills, as all hill-born creatures shut in cities do. The fare he had was meagre and untempting. To the people whom he was with he was a little peasant, a little student, nothing more; they were too busy to heed him further.

The town was very dark, very chill, very oppressive; with the furious alpine winds driving through it, and the high arcades shutting in the blackness of the shadows, and the bitterness of

the cold, it was like a vast tomb, after the radiance of the sunset and the sunrise from the mountains beyond the Lastra.

Physically he suffered much in his new life. Like Rossini, he had to study his score in his bed, to keep his hands from being numbed to ice. When he went out in the gloom of the streets, it seemed to him as if noon were night. He fainted twice from hunger and the stifling sense of want of air in the class-room of the academy. He did not know how to breathe, being shut for ever within four walls—he who had been used to dwell on the high hills with the sheep, and wander through the thyme and the gorse like the kids.

Other lads mocked him for a thousand things—for his girlish beauty; for his gentle ways; for his coarse-spun shirts; for his horror of hurting any creature; for his innocence of mind; for his long thick curls; for his hatred of shoes, which he would fling off the moment that he wanted to run fast;—for a thousand things that made him at once so wise and so foolish, so childlike and so thoughtful; while they were town-bred world-

worn young scholars, who knew everything and meditated upon nothing.

He suffered much in many ways.

Yet he wrote no lie when he told them that he was happy. He was happy, though always lonely, and sometimes frightened, and very often persecuted. He was happy, looking upward at the face of the St. Cecilia. Happy, learning all that the great professors of his chosen art would teach him. Happy, in his own little attic, that he would fly to for refuge, as a bird to its nest, studying with all the powers of his mind the themes that had been given him to comprehend or to compose; happiest of all, when they ordered him a sonnet of Metastasio, or an ode of Giusti, to be set to music in a dozen different ways, and he could let all his subtlest combinations and wildest fancies have full play, and, sitting in the little dark garret, heard again the "beautiful things" that he had used to hear on his own mountains, till it seemed to him that the Rusignuolo was with him once more.

"I am as happy as ever I can be," he wrote,

not thinking how cruel the words might sound; and wrote the truth.

For cold and hardship did not hurt him much or seem great things to bear upon his training in the house of Lippo. And mockery wounded him little, because he heard so little what they said, being always dreaming; and those in authority over him praised him for his docile ways, and found his talent great; and many women were kind to him for the sake of his fair face with its beautiful amorous-lidded eyes that never yet had found a woman beautiful; and he believed in his own future.

Who can do this, is happy.

When life is still a coin unspent, it looks of purest gold, and bears on it, under a bough of laurel, the figures of Victory and of Love. But when it is paid away and gone for ever, its poor change left from it is of base metal. Even if other men still see stamped on its alloy the Victory or the Love within the garland, we who hold the poor coin in our own hands know that the figures struck on it are those of Failure and of Falsehood, and that the

laurel-wreath was copied from a faded knot of fennel.

Signa, whose coin was still unspent, wrote truly "I am happy."

Meanwhile another suffered greatly to give him happiness.

Bruno, a poor man as the world measures such things, had always been a rich one in his own esteem. The Lady Poverty of S. Francis had been a mistress with whom he had never quarrelled.

True, he had to labour in all hours and all weathers; he had to be content with rough bread and onion-soup most of his days; he had to be abroad in the driving hailstorm as in the scorching sirocco.

But all things are measured by habit and weighed by comparison. Beside such a man as Sandro Zampetti or the poorer peasants on his own hillside, Bruno was almost wealthy, having no need to stint himself for wood or oil or wine, having those fine cattle of his own, and having, whenever he had cause to go down into the city, loose money in his pocket, more or less, for drinking with a friend or idling with a woman. He had

never thought of himself as a poor man since becoming, at his parents' and his brother's death, the only owner of the old house he and his forefathers had been born in; to have a roof over him and food enough, and to be debtor to no man for anything—that seemed to him wealth.

Perhaps the world was happier when the bulk of its people thought so also.

But now, for the first time in all his life, the check and gall of poverty pressed on him—the chain which rivets to the soil those who gain their bread from it was for the first time heavy about his feet.

He had to send the boy from him; he had to let him go and live alone; he had to trust blindly that all was well. He could not stir. He could not go and see for himself. He could not move and dwell wherever the thing he loved might drift. He had to stay there, and turn the same sods and prune the same trees day after day, month after month, year after year.

For the first time he realised the one supreme good of money—that it gives wings to men.

When the heart of a man or woman is where the feet are, wings are not needed; but when the heart goes longingly far away, and the feet must still abide on the same spot, then the simplest and hardiest yearns for flight.

Gold is the talaria of Hermes.

Bruno, who knew nothing of Hermes, but saw the winged figure painted in a thousand places and modelled in a thousand ways in the friezes of old villas and the streets of old towns, longed for such plumes to his ankles that he might bridge space and see the boy. But freedom and travel were as impossible to him as those feathered sandals. He had to stay treading his fields from dawn to nightfall. For the first time as he followed his oxen he felt as if the clinging sods were weights of leaden fetters.

Still he worked more than ever.

As it was, he could scarcely make ends meet. It was a very different thing to keep the boy where food and drink, light and fuel, all came off the soil, costing nothing; and to keep him far off in a city where every crumb called for a coin.

Luigi Dini, indeed, whom he had sent with him, had put the lad with people that he knew—good, honest, simple-living souls, who gave him a room under their roof for little in the grand square where the Guardamorta of Dante is, and where the coppersmiths and market-folks wrangle and tussle all day long.

But to maintain him thus, and meet the cost of his studies too, drained dry the leathern sack in which Bruno, when his accounts were squared with his master, put his surplus. All that came from the bit of land which had been Alessio's he counted as the boy's, and put aside for him entire, and sent to him as it was wanted. But that was not sufficient; and to obtain all that was needed Bruno had to stint himself down to the leanest portion that a man can live on even in this land of his where hard handlabour is often cheerfully wrought from daybreak to evensong on a piece of blackened week-old bread.

His beasts he would not stint, not even for Signa. His oxen were to him fond fellow-labourers and friends. But himself he denied all except the sheer necessities of life; and the

grey came into his dark hair, and his strong, slender, erect frame grew leaner still, and he never went down into the city save early in the forenoon of a market morning, lest temptation should assail him and he should spend a coin on his own appetites or wishes. His life was going away from him with no sweetness in it and no love and no pleasure. But he did not think of that. It did not matter.

Two years went by—swiftly to the boy, leaping from height to height of his great art, and feeling nothing of poverty or privation, because always living in impersonal desires, and always dreaming of the future time, and always hearing the music of the spheres above all the bray of voices and the clang of metal and the tumult of footsteps in the streets around him.

But very slowly to Bruno.

To rise in the dark; to toil all day; to lie down for the heavy dreamless sleep of bodily fatigue; to wrestle with storm and drought and blight and hurricane; to chaffer for small gains; to follow the oxen up and down and to and fro; to go tired into an empty house and eat an un-

shared loaf and go to a joyless bed;—this was his portion.

There was nothing in it to give wings to time.

One day succeeded another without change, and the tale of one month was as the tale of another. It was the life of a beast of burden—nothing more. He had always thought no life could be better; but it was oppressive to him now.

Other men laboured for their children, or had that dusky settle by the wood embers made bright by some fresh-faced new-wed maiden. But he was all alone—alone with the thought of dead Dina on the mountain height and Pippa's body drifted to the sea.

Men would have little to say to him—they were Lippo's friends.

He lived in almost absolute solitude. Sometimes it grew dreary, and the weeks seemed long.

Two years went by—slowly.

Signa did not come home. The travel to and fro took too much money, and he was engrossed in his studies, and it was best so; so Luigi Dini said, and Bruno let it be. The boy did not ask to return. His letters were very brief and not

very coherent, and he forgot to send messages to old Teresina or to Palma. But there was no fear for him.

The sacristan's friends under whose roof he was wrote once in a quarter, and spoke well of him always, and said that the professors did the same, and that a gentler lad or one more wedded to his work they never knew. And so Bruno kept his soul in patience, and said, "Do not trouble him; when he wishes he will come—or if he want anything. Let him be."

To those who have traversed far seas and many lands, and who can bridge untravelled countries by the aid of experience and of understanding, such partings have pain, but a pain lessened by the certain knowledge of their span and purpose. By the light of remembrance or of imagination they can follow that which leaves them.

But Bruno had no such solace.

To him all that was indefinite was evil; all that was unfamiliar was horrible. It is the error of ignorance at all times.

To him the world was like the dark fathomless waste of waters shelving away to nameless shape-

less perils such as the old Greek mariners drew upon their charts as compassing the shores they knew.

He had no light of knowledge by which to pursue in hope or fancy the younger life that would be launched into the untried realms. To him such separation was as death.

He could not write; he could not even read what was written. He could only trust to others that all was well with the boy.

He could have none of that mental solace which supports the scholar; none of that sense of natural loveliness which consoles the poet; his mind could not travel beyond the narrow circlet of its own pain; his eyes could not see beauty everywhere from the green fly at his foot to the sapphire mountains above his head; he only noticed the sunset to tell the weather; he only looked across the plain to see if the rain-fall would cross the river. When the autumn crocus sank under his share, to him it was only a weed best withered; in hell he believed, and for heaven he hoped, but only dully, as certain things that the priests knew; but all consolations of the mind

or the fancy were denied to him. Superstitions, indeed, he had, but these were all:—sad coloured fungi in the stead of flowers.

The Italian has not strong imagination.

His grace is an instinct; his love is a phrenzy; his gaiety is rather joy than jest; his melancholy is from temperament, not meditation; nature is little to him; and his religion and his passions alike must have physical indulgence and perpetual nearness, or they are nothing.

Bruno, who had strong passions and blind faiths, but who had no knowledge and no insight, was solitary as only a man utterly ignorant can be solitary. But he never complained even in his own thoughts; and he never attempted to seek any solace. He had set himself on absolute self-sacrifice, and he went through with it, as thousands and tens of thousands of his own countrymen have done before him in the old days from Chrysostom to Francis, in the monasteries that rise majestic amidst the brown wastes of the sun-burned plains, and crown the emerald radiance of the hill-throned vines.

He was in his fields all day, having a crust of

bread in his pocket, and a flask of his own wine under the hedge. He went indoors only when it was quite dark, and was at work again before any gleam of sun showed over the Umbrian mountains. Nothing broke the monotonous measure of his time. Nothing relieved the constant strain of toil. He thought that he grew old. But it was only that his weeks and months had the dulness and the barrenness of age.

Climbing the steep vinelands, reaping in the sun, driving his oxen, working among the bare boughs in the teeth of the north wind, he thought always of Signa, far away there in the unknown city amongst the unfamiliar people.

Did Signa think of him?

He wished that he could know.

The boy's letters were few; but then that was because their postage cost money, and every centime was of value. Luigi Dini read them. They had always messages, tender, thankful, affectionate.

But that was not much.

Bruno knew that the boy's soul and heart and fancy had long left him, and soared into a world

that he himself could no more reach than he could reach the star Sirius shining over the reapen fields in the hot night. He doubted if remembrance had much hold on this child, who when with him and beside him had always been dreaming of the future. He did not reason about it. Only he said to himself:—

"It is as if he were dead."

But as, had the boy been dead, he would have spent all that he possessed on masses and prayers to ransom his soul and purchase heaven for him, as he would have fancied that he could do, so he toiled now, and with as little thought of recompense or remembrance.

"It is as if he were dead," he said often.

"Nay, nay!" the old man would urge to him. "He only lives a stronger life, that is all, on his own wings, as full-fledged birds do. The world will hear of him. He will be fortunate, I think. He will do something great. He has true genius. Then he will come to you and say, 'I should have been a little hungry homeless goatherd all my years had it not been for you. All that I am, and all that I do, and all that men

praise in me, I owe to you.' That is how he will come back one day."

But Bruno shook his head, and worked on amongst his vines and wheat, not lifting his eyes up from the soil.

"What will be, will be," he said, curtly.

But he did not deceive himself, nor did he even desire to be much remembered.

Remembrance of himself would mean, for the lad, failure.

CHAPTER XIII.

MEANWHILE Lippo, munching tomatoes stewed with garlic, in the warm weather with his casement open to the evening air, said to his wife:

"Nita, I met a man in the city to-day who has come over from Bologna upon business. He told me that old Dini's boast is not untrue—that the boy of Bruno's is doing well at the Music School, and that people say he is clever, and he gains quattrini singing in the churches—only Bruno does not know that. The man knew, because his own son is at the great School, having a good bass voice that they think to make something of in a year or two. It is a good thing that we never stinted the lad, and that all the Lastra said how good we were to him, and always let

him go to mass, and never a clean shirt for Toto but there was one for him too. If ever the lad should do anything that the world talks about (not that I think it likely, an idle, dreaming brat), still, if ever it do come to pass, people will know we have fair claim on him, and nobody could say that if he neglect us that it would be other than rank thanklessness. Not that what we did, we did for gain. No, never! But they do say those singing men and women make rare fortunes. Or if he write for the theatres and the churches—there is the man of Pesaro that wrote the 'Gazza Ladra' and the 'Otello'—I have heard them scores of times down in the city; he lives still, or did quite lately; and such a fuss with him as kings and queens and other countries make—if it should be ever so with this dainty boy of Bruno's—well, we did our duty by him, wife. That we can say honestly."

"Aye, that we did!" said Nita, with a grin on her wide angry mouth, scarlet as the tomato that she ate.

Nita was a rough woman and a masterful, and could lie when need arose with all the stubborn-

ness and inventiveness that could be desired from any daughter of Eve. But she could not take the daily pleasure that her lord did in keeping up the lie all the day long in her own household, when all need was over, and not a creature there to be the dupe of it.

"We did our duty by him, and very few there would have been who would have taken pity on Bruno's base-born, and brought him to a sense of what he owed to it," said Lippo, pushing his emptied plate away with a sigh.

He had talked himself very nearly into the belief that the boy was Bruno's, and his own charity just what he had told the neighbours. He had said it so often that he had nearly grown into the belief that it was true.

"I was thinking," he added, timidly, for he was always timid before Nita, since who could say how she might persuade Baldo to leave his money? "I was thinking—after all, he is our blood, though not come rightly by it—what do you say if we were to send him a little basket of figs and the like when this man goes back to Bologna? It would be just a little remembrance,

and show one bore no rancour against him for that fit of passion when he blinded you."

"Wait till he has written his opera," said Nita, with her mouth still in an angry laughter. "You are a shrewd fellow, Lippo. But sometimes you are too over-fond of counting your chickens before your hen has even laid an egg. Figs are figs, and fetch five centimes each till August comes. And clever boys are like lettuces: in much sun they run all to seed. Your precious brute Bruno gives this lad all sun. If I had had him——"

"Ah!" said Lippo, with a smile and sigh together, and girded up his loins and went into the street to see who was inclined to play a turn at dominoes; and told the barber and the butcher that the poor boy Signa was trying to do right in Bologna, and was studying hard.

"Oh, I bear no ill-will. We are all poor creatures; where should we be at our best unless the saints were there to intercede for us?" said he, with gentle self-deprecation, when they praised his kind way of speaking. "Oh, I bear no ill-will; Bruno is hard, and always unjust, and the

greed of getting gold grows on him; but some day he will see the wrong that he has done. I can wait. It is sad to live ever in estrangement, but when one knows one's innocence and good intent—and the poor lad truly never was to blame. He was encouraged in rebellion and ingratitude. I have sent him a trifle of money by a man that is going to Bologna; he is in little difficulties, so they tell me, and one does not like a boy to suffer for his elder's fault. Besides, now he has left, he sees who were his true friends. Bruno dotes on him; oh, yes, in a mad fashion, but hoards for him, and presses poor men he lends to, as he did to Baccio—poor Baccio Alessio; he is in the Bargello for another debt! and all his children starve! it is not the way to bring a blessing on the lad. So I have a mind to tell Bruno, only he is so violent, and never speaks to me, being ashamed no doubt. But all that is not the lad's fault. Nor would one visit it."

And Lippo sat down to his dominoes, and was so pleased with himself that he cheated a little more than usual by way of self-reward. He never cheated greatly, because he knew that to

cheat a little every evening, with success and undetected, is much more productive and more prudent than to cheat with a big audacity, that reaps one golden harvest and then is found out, and so for ever ended.

"You will call him 'nephew' if he should write for a theatre, and get paid?" said old Baldo, looking up at him through his spectacles, as he returned, with some loose notes in his pocket, of which he would not speak to Nita.

"Blood is blood, without the Church or notary, that I do think," said Lippo, gently; he liked those vague well-sounding phrases that pledged nothing.

Old Baldo chuckled and smoked a second pipe. Baldo settled within himself that he would let all his savings and his snug little purchase of land above Giovoli go unrestricted to his daughter; her husband, he saw, was not a man to waste money or opportunities, poor-spirited fool though the cobbler thought him, as he heard Nita's voice saluting his return to bed with a shower of invectives, that rolled through the open casement on the night stillness up to the Pisan Gate.

"My dear," he heard Lippo's soft voice answer. "My dear, I have only been to drink a cup of coffee with the good canon. When he was so gracious as to do me so much honour, how could I say no?"

Baldo chuckled.

He did not like Lippo; he was impatient of him, and contemptuous of him, but he felt a sort of respect for him, nevertheless, as he listened where he sat in the porch.

Anyway, Lippo was a safe man to leave one's money to, and all one's little outstanding crop of bad debtors.

He might be poor-spirited—no doubt he was. A bold opponent might wring his neck like a chicken's. But such pretty, neat, ready-lying as this would stand him in better stead than all the high spirit in the world; which, after all, only serves to get a man into hot water in this life and eternal fire in the next.

Baldo put his pipe out, and nodded to the barber, who was taking his neighbours' characters away by lamplight under the Madonna of Good Counsel, and double-locked his house-door, and carried his stout old body to his bed.

"I used to wish she had married the other one," he thought, as he laid himself down. "But he would have throttled her in a fit of passion; he would never have kept her quiet with the Canon's cup of coffee. And he would never have got in for me all my bad debts. He would have burnt my ledgers as soon as I was dead. He is a fool. I am glad she married the clever one."

CHAPTER XIV.

NEARLY two years had gone away.

It was a still night at the end of September. It was on the eve of the vintage.

The vines lie open everywhere: to the roads, to the streams, to the mule-tracks, to the bridle-paths, over the hills, down by the water under the cypresses, against the old towers, anywhere and everywhere, climbing like gipsy children, and as little guarded.

Only when they are quite ripe, then the peasants keep watch with their guns at night; the gipsy children have grown as precious then as little queens. Over the dark and quiet country shots echo every now and then; perhaps it is a bird shot, or a dog, or a fox, or nothing at all, or perhaps a man—it matters little; if he were

stealing the grapes he deserves his fate, and living or dead will never complain.

Bruno, like others, loaded his gun and watched abroad in these latter weeks when the vintage was so near.

In September, summer has the day, but autumn takes the night. It was the twentieth, and after sunset was cold. He wrapped his brown cloak round him, and with his white dog walked to and fro the grass paths of his vines, or sat on the stone bench outside his house while the hours wore away.

On the morrow they would all begin to gather; nearly everybody in the Signa country, at the same time and moment. Then the winepresses would run over in the shade of the great sheds, and the oxen would munch at their will the hanging leaves unmuzzled.

It would be an abundant vintage, and wine in the winter plenteous and cheap; there was joy in all the little households scattered over the mountains and the plains, behind the gold of their stacks, and under the blue of their skies.

The hours wore away. The clock of the vil-

lage church midway on the hill told them with its sad dull sound; all clocks and bells sound mournful in the night. There was no wind; but the smell of the ripened fruit, and of the stone-pines, and the balm firs, was strong upon the air. The moon was a slender crescent, just resting on the black edge of the mountains before it sank from sight. The turf was pale in the shadows, with the faint colours of the leafless colchicum, and the blush hues of the mitre-flowers. The screech-owl hooted with joy high in the tops of the trees. The bats wheeled, like brown leaves blown about on a wild breeze. Bruno sat in the fragrant cold darkness, with his old gun resting against a hive, and stretched before him the dog.

He sat thinking of the yield of the morrow, but alert for every sound. It was so lonely here that thieves were likelier to be daring than in any place with aid nearer, within call; but on the other hand, there were no tramps from the towns, nor idlers from the beggar-haunts; it was too high to be traversed, or even known to such as these. He had had frays with poachers

thrice in all the years he had lived alone there; that was all; and each time they had been worsted, and had fled with his good swanshot in their flesh.

As he sat now, when it was past midnight, and the moon had vanished behind her mountain, withdrawing her little delicate curled golden horn, as if to blow with it the trumpet call of morning, he heard steps coming up the steep ascent of his own fields, and the fallen leaves rustling and crackling. The dog sprang up, barking. Bruno pointed his gun.

He did not speak; it was not his way; if they came there after an evil errand let them get their measure, and be paid for it. He waited.

It was too dark to see anything. It was of no use to fire aimlessly into the cloudy blackness of the clustered vines.

The steps came nearer, the leaves rustled louder. He lifted his gun to his shoulder, and in another second would have fired at the wavering shadow that seemed to move the boughs; when suddenly the dog's wrath ceased; it sprang forward with a yelp of welcome, leaping and

fawning; he paused, afraid that he might fire on the dog, angered with the beast, and astonished; the dog bounded into the darkness, and out of the darkness there came a slender swift figure, graceful from the vines, as the young Borghese Bacchus.

Signa stretched his arms out.

"Do not fire! do not fire! It is I!"

Bruno threw his gun upward, and shot the charge off in the air, then with all his soul in his eyes, caught the boy in his strong hands.

"Oh, my dear! oh, my love! I might have killed you!"

All the great silent, longing heart of him went out in the tenderness of the words.

Till this moment he had hardly known how he had longed to see the face of the boy.

After a little he drew Signa within the porch, and went and lighted a lamp, and brought it out, and let its rays shine on the lad from head to foot; and looked at him again and again and again, with his own dark oxlike eyes, dim and yet luminous, with all his heart shining out of them, while he never spoke a word.

Signa had changed but little, except that he had grown tall, like a young acacia tree; he was very pale, and very thin; he looked fatigued and weak; he had all the soft grace of his nation; his limbs were beautiful in shape, though very slender; his throat was like a statue's, and his delicate head drooped always a little downward, like a flower on a bending stalk.

He was more than ever before like the Endymion of the Tribune.

The moon had kissed him. With earth he had nothing more to do. His eyes seemed to say—

"Why keep me here?"

Bruno felt it—dimly.

"Your body is come back," he said, sadly. "But—"

He did not end his phrase. He knew what he felt. But he knew hardly how to say it.

The soul would never come back: never.

"Yes, I am come back," said Signa, with a smile, answering the words and not the thought. "I would not write. I walked all the way to save the money. I thought I should have been

here before dark. Have I seemed thankless? What can I say? You have given me more than life. You have given me life eternal."

"Hush! Come in and eat. You look weak, come in."

Bruno—someway—why he did not know, could not bear the boy to thank him. He gave all his own life for the boy's—just that—no more, no less. But he could not bear to speak of it.

Leaving the vines to any chance of theft, he took Signa within and heaped for him such rude fare as his house held; bread and wine, and some fine fruit that had been meant for market. He watched him at the meal with fond eyes, as a mother might have done, but he spoke little. His heart was full. He was so happy.

The boy had walked all the way to see him; only to see him!

He had not forgotten. He had needed nothing. He had only come back from remembrance and affection. The moment paid Bruno for all the twenty long months of solitude and toil.

"You wanted to see me, and you walked all the way!" he said, over and over again; those

words and nothing more. It was so incredible to him, and yet so natural. He was grateful, as liberal natures are to those who owe them all things, and pay them with an hour's tenderness.

Signa coloured a little and looked away.

"Yes, I walked; what of that? It was so long a time—to see you and the Lastra—"

Then he touched Bruno's hand with his lips, in soft caressing grace.

"It was good of you," said Bruno, simply, and the tears stood in his eyes. The boy had loved him always—never forgotten—had walked all the way only to see his face again!

The seventeen years of labour and of sacrifice and of forethought and of shelter all rolled away from his recollection; he had done nothing, so it seemed to him; and it was he who was Signa's debtor. Generous natures wrong themselves as much as others wrong them.

"If you had sent me word you should have had the money to travel; I would have got it somehow," he said, resting his elbows on the table, and still gazing at Signa, while the brass lamp burned between them, its wick wavering in

the draught. "I did not ask you, dear—no—Luigi Dini said that you were best left undisturbed, and I said, let him be till his heart speaks—till he remembers and wants to come. Ah, dear, it is more than your body that comes back—it is your heart too."

"Surely," murmured Signa, but the colour rose a little again in his pale cheeks, and he drank off his wine quickly.

"You have walked far to-day?"

"Only from Prato: and through Carmignano—I thought of Gemma. Nothing is ever heard of her?"

"Nothing. Palma is well—a good girl, as good as gold."

"Poor little Gemma!" said Signa, with a sigh; he could not quite forget the pretty golden-headed sullen little temptress that had made him play and dance that fair day on the stones of Prato.

"If she be alive she is bad. You cannot change a gnat to a bee," said Bruno, briefly. "And, dear, do tell me of yourself—there is so much to hear—you have been happy?"

Signa's eyes shone like Endymion's lifted to the moon.

"Happy!—that is so little. It is much more than that."

"But the people are good to you. You want for nothing? You have all you wish?"

"Oh, no, I want for nothing, Perhaps I am hungry sometimes and cold;—the other lads laugh, the masters blame;—the bread runs short, the shirts are worn out, the women say so—what does it matter? It makes so little difference. While one has strength enough, and can have faith in oneself—one has the future. What do the little things signify? One does not notice even—"

Bruno was silent. He did not understand.

"The angels speak to him, I suppose," he thought.

"Is the Lastra changed?" said Signa, "I cannot give it gates of gold—not yet."

"How should the Lastra change?" said Bruno, to whom it was immutable and eternal as the mountains.

"I do not know," said Signa. "Only I am

so changed that it seems to me everything else must be so too. It is as if I had been away a thousand years."

"You were so sad of heart for us."

Bruno's face lightened with a deep unspoken gladness. All this while that he had been resigned to be forgotten, the boy had longed for his old home, and now had tramped on foot two hundred miles and more to clasp him by the hand!

Signa answered with swift questions of a score of things: Tinello and Pastore, and Teresina at the gate, and the harvest, and the flowers of Giovoli, and the old priest on the hill, and all the things and people of the old life he had left.

Himself he knew that he seemed to have been parted from them a thousand years, not for his regret or for his sorrow, but for the immeasurable distance of thought and knowledge that divided him from them all; from that hopeless sense "they cannot understand," which yawned in an unbridged gulf of difference between himself and them.

"And to-morrow we begin to gather," said Bruno, replying to him. "It will take two days or more. The grapes are very fine; the last rains swelled them so. You will see all the people. There is not one dead. They will be so glad. No doubt you thought of vintage when you chose the time? It was well chosen."

"I did not remember," murmured Signa, glancing at the brown knapsack that he had put away in one corner. "But as I came along I noticed the vines were ready; and by Carmignano a woman gave me a ripe bunch. You will be busy then all the week?"

"But you will stay the week, and more?"

"If you wish."

He leaned his head on his hand; he spoke wearily; his face flushed a little with the same uneven changeful colour.

"You are tired, dear," said Bruno, tenderly. "From Prato;—it is a long way for you. Very long. And the nights cold. You look to have so little strength. You must have overworked yourself. Go to your bed, dear. That will be best now. We shall have time to talk; and it is

selfishness to keep you up; and with your eyes so sleepy. Look, you see the bed is ready. I have always kept it so. Quite ready. For I said who knows—he may get tired of the city or of his learning, and come back without one's knowing. Only I did think you might forget;—and you have not forgotten. The people will be so glad; and you will play to them."

"And if ever you should tire and should be of a different mind," he added, setting down the lamp by the little bed. "They say boys do change—dream of great things, and of learning, and then see the cities a little, and the hollowness and labour of it all, and grow content to return into the old quiet ways, and leave the world to its own burdens—they say so, men who know. Well, if ever it should be so with you, or if it be so now, why there is your bit of land by the brook always ready for you as this bed is, and getting better and better every year, and yielding more. A safe place for you, and daily bread, and the house we would build in no time—that is, you know, if ever you should change and wish for it. There it always is. A solid bit of land:—if you

should ail anything or be disappointed, or see with different eyes; that is all, dear. Good night, and the saints keep you. And it was good of you to think of me, and to walk all the way."

Signa was too tired to hear the words very clearly, and was ready to stretch himself wearily on the little familiar mattress over which Bruno had been careful to set the blessed palm of the previous Easter. Bruno left him and took his gun again and went out into the moonless night to continue his watch of the vineyard.

But all the sky seemed light to him.

The boy had wanted to see him, and had walked all the way! He was quite happy as he sat in the silence and the darkness. A great hope was warm around his heart. The boy had come back.

That proof of love was so precious to him that all his years of toil were effaced by it and all his solitude glorified.

Who could say that the old ways and the old habits, and the native air and the native soil, and the freedom of the high hills, might not have

some sweetness in them after all, and roost at home those young, tired, wandering feet? It was possible at least.

Bruno crossed himself where he sat, with the musket resting at his knee, and thanked the Mother of God. He thanked her. He would not pray for anything. He would not ask for anything. He was content, — quite content.

The boy had come back. That was enough.

"Only to see me; only just to see me!—and walking all the way!" he repeated to himself while the hours wore away.

Dawn came very soon.

It seemed to Bruno that it had come when the last gleam of the moon behind the mountains had shone on the face of Signa, with the red vine-leaves against his forehead.

CHAPTER XV.

WITH the sunrise the vintage began.

Signa opposed nothing; but entered into all the work and pleasure as if he were the little fellow who had run home with his Rusignuolo seven years before. There was an effort in it all; his heart was not in it; in his eyes there was the old far-away wistful look; and, at times, he fell into abstraction and silence. But Bruno was too incessantly occupied to notice those shadows on his sunshine. The boy was home again; that was enough. When he saw Signa's slender brown hands pulling down the grape clusters, and heard his voice calling across the hillside to the men with the teams, he was content; so utterly content himself that it did not occur to him to dream that the youth could

be otherwise. And he was very proud of him.

Proud of his soft grace, of his straight limbs, of his delicate, serious beauty; proud of that very something about him which was so difficult to define, but which seemed to separate him from all those around him as widely as the solitary gold-winged oriole differs from the brown multitude of the tree sparrows.

Signa had learned other things beside his own art away there under the Alpine winds; he had studied all that he could, night and day, old lore and new;—it was not very much, but to his old associates it seemed miraculous; they did not understand what it was, but they felt that this young scholar was a glory to them. One told another, and from all the country about, as far as the bridge of Greve, people came to see him and speak with him, and when the good priest challenged him in Latin, and he could answer with ease and grace, and when the head gardener of Giovoli, who was a Frenchman, spoke to him in his own tongue, and was fairly answered in it, Signa seemed to his old friends and com-

panions something very wonderful—a little fellow running barefoot and cutting food for the oxen only a day ago, as it seemed.

They said with another that he could not have been Pippa's son;—no, certainly, that was surer than ever,—never poor Pippa's son;—if Bruno's! Who knew? Bruno had been famous for his physical comeliness in his younger years. Who knew?—patrician ladies had strange fancies sometimes; their contadini could tell rare tales of some of their love fancies.

So they gossipped going down the hill after seeing the boy in the cool evening shadows, or talking with him in the Lastra. At last it became settled with them; the human tongue, once beginning to jump, takes such grasshopper-leaps from conjecture to affirmation—yes, that was the secret of it all, they said. Bruno had pleased some grand dame too well for her peace or honour, and this was how it came that the boy had such tastes and such an air about him, and Bruno money enough to make a scholar of him;—yes, that was how it was.

"We always knew it," said the women, with

a sagacious twirl of their distaff; and added, that they could name the erring princess if they chose, but it was perilous work to light truth under great names; like thrusting burning straws under a hornet's nest.

As for Lippo he waited, hearing all they said; and then, by accident, was in the street close by the Livornese Gate as the boy came down old Teresina's stairs, and stopped with his gentlest smile before him.

"Dear; we rejoice to hear you do so well," he said, with outstretched hands, knowing his wife was safe over her linen, washing in the brook underneath the trees by S. Maria. "It is so sad. Bruno is hard to turn—we are estranged. But it was all an error. I was too rough with you about that violin when you were little. Yes, that I feel; I have done penance for it often. But we were as good to you as we knew how to be, so poor as we were and with so many children. Indeed, we loved you always, and Nita nursed you. You and my Toto are as foster-brothers. I never can forget all that."

Signa put out his hands.

"I forgive everything," he said, gently. "When one is free and away, that is easy. But friends we cannot be; it would be unjust to Bruno. And I do not know that I do well. I cannot tell—not yet. One may fail."

And he went on his way to the church of the Misericordia, the little dark church, where his first communion with the old masters of his art had opened to him the glories that lie in the science of sound.

Lippo went the other way, chagrined.

"I wish he would not say that he forgives," he thought; "it sounds as if one had dealt ill by him. I am glad I did not ask him to the house. Perhaps it is all moonshine what they say of him. 'One may fail,' he says. Fail in what thing I wonder? Nita was right. It is as well to wait, and be quite sure. Only, whatever happens, Nita nursed him. That he never can forget, if he should succeed in anything and get a name."

For Lippo, like many others before him, held that a life that rises from obscurity to triumph, should look back in grateful obligation

to those who, when it was in obscurity, did their best to keep it there.

The stone in the mud cries to the butterfly against the clouds, "Come down and kiss me, for when you were a grub I did my best to crush you: is not that a link between us?"

"We will go down to Fiastra," said Bruno, on the third evening, when all the grapes were gathered in. It was so the old farm-house was called where all the hill-side danced at vintage time. The bell was ringing from its roof; an old bell that had on its copper—"Lavora: et noli contristari," and had been cast in the tenth century or earlier.

They were rich peasants at Fiastra. They had cattle and horses of their own. They had a wide rambling dwelling-house with immense halls and large lofty chambers. There was a great stone court-yard in the centre; the house ran round three sides of it; the fourth side was open to the hill-slope, with all the landscape shining through a screen of pines. They had a numerous family of grown-up sons and young daughters. All through

the vintage month, while the maize was being picked, they used to dance there, and ring the bell above the roof and bring all the contadini above and below within hearing up and down to the merriment. The youths and the maidens shelled the Indian corn, and romped and jested and made love; when night fell, some one played on a mandoline; perhaps there was a pipe or a flute, too, and sometimes some wandering musician had a tambourine. They whirled and jumped about to the rattling music, while the old people smoked or spun, and the babies tumbled with the dogs, with the yellow maize lying in a pile and the calm night skies above, and the hill-side shining white in the starlight through the colonnade of the graceful serious pines. They had done this in the old house for centuries, always, as maize harvest and vintage came round; prosperous folks, honest, simple and gay; generation succeeding generation, without break, and changing in nothing.

There still are many such in this country. Soon there will be none. For Discontent already creeps into each of these happy households, and

under her fox-skin hood says: "Let me in—I am Progress."

They had always gone down to Fiastra. It was the custom on all the hill-side. But since Signa had been away, Bruno had had no heart to go there; the lads and the girls were so merry and so happy in their manner of life; it had made his heart ache the more; why could not Pippa's son have been so?

But now all was well again. It was different. The boy had come back. "Walked all the way! —just to see me!" Bruno had said to each neighbour that day, going out of his habit of silence in the gladness of his soul.

It was early; they were still shelling the last maize; the bell was just beginning to sound; girls were trooping in, in their work-a-day dress; but each had their little strings of pearls round their throats. Palma, who came amongst them, had no pearls. She was not so much even as a contadina. She felt very brown and rough and unlovely beside the grace of Signa. She could not keep herself from thinking how Gemma would have looked if she had stayed there and

had lived; how pretty, though having no ornament but her bright glancing hair and her wild-rose cheeks.

Palma took a portion of corn and shelled it, sitting apart on a bench. She was not content like Bruno.

"His body has come back, but not his heart," she thought: "and his feet will soon wander again."

"Will you not dance with me, Palma?" he asked her, when they touched the mandoline.

Palma looked up and smiled; but she shook her head. She danced like all the rest at other times, but this night she could not; she seemed to herself to have suddenly grown coarse and heavy, and to have her feet shod with lead. To be fit for him, she thought, one wanted butterfly's wings and a face like a flower's—a face like what Gemma's would have been, if Gemma had been dancing there.

Bruno stood with the elder men and talked of the vintage and the new wine, smoking their pipes under the eaves of the house, where a great walnut tree touched the red tiles.

But all the time his eyes followed Signa.

He thought, "He enjoys the old life; he is happy in it; he will not go away again."

Palma sat and shelled her maize and watched him too, as he threw his light limbs about in the careless gestures and joyous bounds, which here, without order or figure, do duty for the western saltarello and the tarantalla of the south.

But Palma thought:

"He does it to please them; he does not care; he is thinking of other things; he wants to be away."

For Palma noticed that his laugh ceased quite suddenly very often, as the laughter of one who at heart is not gay; she noticed that he hardly looked at the brown buxom maidens whom he whirled round in the measures, but often looked away through the stems of the pines to the starlit country, as if the tall straight trunks were the bars of a cage; she noticed that when he paused to take breath and came and sat down beside her and some other girl, though his mouth smiled, his face was grave, and though his words jested, his attention wandered.

"He sees the old ways are good, and that there is no place like home," thought Bruno.

But Palma thought:

"He loves us all still; but he is tired of us. We are dear to him still; but we are wearisome to him, and he would like to be away."

For Bruno deceived himself, because he had hope; but Palma having no hope, had no deception.

After a time, they were fatigued with their romps and their dances, and all rested awhile; cracking walnuts, eating almonds, whispering, joking, bandying love nonsense, with the stars over their heads, and the old dark house behind them, with rich bits of colour here and there in the men's blue shirts, in the girls' red petticoats, in the children's brown limbs, in the broad gold of the sunflowers, in the glazed terra-cotta of the Ascension above the house-door, in the scarlet kerchiefs hanging from a casement, as the light of the stars or of the lamp in the doorway fell fitfully on them.

Signa sat a little apart under the walnut tree; he had forgotten where he was; he was thinking

of what was dearer to him than any man or any woman. He started as they spoke to him.

"Signa! Signa!" the girls cried. "Have you left your heart in Bologna? Why are you dreaming there? Come, sing us something. Let us see if your grand learning has made your voice any sweeter? You have not played a note."

"Sing? here?" he asked, lifting his head in surprise.

His thoughts had gone so far away.

Bruno put his hand on his shoulder:

"Sing or play. Who should care to hear you, if not your old friends here?"

Signa had the habit of obedience in him; he never disputed any wish of Bruno's. He took a mandoline from the old fellow who was thrumming it for the dancers; a grey-headed farmer, seventy years old, who, nevertheless, could string a dance tune together as prettily as any one, and liked to see his grand-daughters skip about like kids.

No one can make much music with the mandoline, but there is no other music, perhaps,

which sounds so fittingly to time and place, as do its simple sonorous tender chords when heard through the thickets of rose-laurel or the festoons of the vines, vibrating on the stillness of the night under the Tuscan moon. It would suit the serenade of Romeo; Desdemona should sing the willow song to it, and not to the harp; Paolo pleaded by it, be sure, many a time to Francesca; and Stradella sang to it the passion whose end was death; it is of all music the most Italian, and it fills the pauses of the love songs softly, like a sigh or like a kiss.

Its very charm is, that it says so little. Love wants so little said.

And the mandoline, though so mournful and full of languor, as Love is, yet can be gay with that caressing joy born of beautiful nothings, which makes the laughter of lovers the lightest-hearted laughter that ever gives silver wings to time.

Signa took the mandoline and struck a few broad sweet chords, sitting under the heavy shade of the walnut leaves, with the pines and the starlit valley before him; just a few chords

in the minor key; sad and soft, and almost solemn.

Then he sang.

He sang the old Misero pargoletto of Leo, which they had heard him sing a thousand times when he was a little fellow driving the sheep, and then he sang the Tu che accendi of Rossini's Tancred, born from the lagunes of Venice, and known wherever a note of music has ever been heard; and then he paused a little, while the young men and the girls filled the air with their chiming voices that echoed the delicious familiar cantilena, in a chorus that vibrated through the pines and up to the skies, as if a thousand nightingales were singing; and then with a few sadder chords, sweet and almost solemn, he passed on to music that they did not know, airs that were quite strange to them, grave recitatives and sweet lovers' serenades and grand airs of prayer and sorrow, and ritornelli, light as thistledown, and cathedral chants as solemn as death; they were all his own, with the freshness of a genius in them that had invigorated itself from study, but had borrowed nothing and retained its own originality, as the

flower takes fresh colours from the bees, yet is a flower still, and never is a bee.

"What is it?" they asked one another; for what with their own songs handed down from mouth to mouth and their little wandering theatres and their love of what is good in melody and the traditions of it, common in all households, these people know by ear so much that is ancient and beautiful; though they could not talk learnedly about it, and though the names of the masters are as Sanscrit to them.

"What is it?" they asked one another; but they soon ceased to whisper even that, and could only listen in rapt silence.

It was music that had a familiarity to them, inasmuch as it had something of the wild, fresh, hill-born fragrance of their own popular songs, with which they followed the bullocks and lightened the toils of seed-time and harvest. But, again, it was wholly unlike what they knew, having a great purity and rarity in it. Something of the radiance of the old Greek music blended with the solemnity of the litanies and the misereri of the Renaissance of religious com-

position; it was music in which the voice of the lover pleading to his beloved on the moonlit nights of vintage was blended with the cry of the desolate soul to stay the hand of the God that scourged it; it was music true to that profound canon of the Italian people: "La musicà è il lamento dell' amore, o' la preghiera a gli Dei."

They listened—the girls leaning their arms on their knees, and their cheeks on their hands; the young peasants resting against the pine-stems, or stretched on the benches of stone; the old people drawn together underneath the lamps and the story of the Ascension, with their pipe-bowls cold with ashes, and their spinning-wheels ceasing to turn.

The very dogs were silent, and the little tumbling children, falling against one another, kept mute, with their curls intermingled, and their big bright eyes lifted upward.

The face of Signa was quite in shadow where he sat under the walnut branches; the mandolin lay motionless across his knees; he sang on, and on, and on, as the young David might have sung to the madness of Saul.

He had forgotten all that surrounded him, his soul was in his music.

When his voice ceased quite suddenly, he looked at the people about him; the women were in tears, the men listened breathless; there was a moment's silence, then they sprang to their feet, all of them with one accord, and flung themselves on him, and kissed his hands, and his hair, and his clothes, and his feet, and shouted, and laughed, and cried, and lifted him up on their shoulders, and called out to the moon just sinking—

"Look at him! look at him! Our own little Signa, and yet as great as this! Oh, the beautiful music! Did the angels teach it to you, dear—the angels you used to see?"

Bruno alone stood apart, and Palma sat in the shade of the high house wall.

When they let him go at last that night, he smiled on them, standing bareheaded in the shadows:

"You are the first to praise me—I will always think of that."

Then he broke loose from them and went

quickly away, forgetting everything. For his heart was beating loud, and his eyes swam, and the faintness of a great emotion made the hill-side reel before him for a moment. He wanted to be alone. They were only peasant people—farming-men and girls from the fields—but if they were moved like that, would the world be wholly indifferent?

He climbed up the steep path towards Bruno's home, and sat down under one of the pines and thought. The old house of Fiastra was below him, he was out of the hum of the voices, but he could have heard dance music had there been any. He was glad it was all silent—he was glad they could not dance again—so soon.

There was no sound anywhere around him.

Far down below the lights of the Lastra glistened; above were the fields and the woods and the blue mountain crest. This was his home. He loved it. Nevertheless he said to himself: "Every day here is a day lost. How shall I tell it to Bruno?"

Bruno—who to every man he met, and to every woman coming through the vines, had said always, with such pride in his voice, "He has come back

—he has walked all the way only to see me—only just for that!"

And Signa never heard him without a rush of blood to his cheeks and a rush of shame to his heart,—knowing that it was not so.

He had not been there long before a step crushed the fallen leaves and fir-needles, a step ascending with swift, elastic, even tread, the tread of feet that have never been trammelled in leather.

"Dear, are you there?" said Bruno's voice.

Signa rose and met him. They went upward together.

The old house of Fiastra was shutting itself up for sleep; the people were breaking up and going homeward; going without their usual twitter of flute and thrilling of mandoline, and without their usual jests and laughter, talking in low murmurs of the wonderful boy, who yet was their own little fellow—the little fellow that had been hungry, and footsore, and beaten, and made a mock of so many years, in the house by the Mother of Good Counsel.

The heavens were brilliant. Coma Berenice

was setting northward, and above the sea mountains Arcturus shone in full splendour, soon to pass away. Perseus gleamed bold on his white field of light: he had been shooting fire-arrows half August through the sky, and now was still. Very low down, eastward and southward, as though watching over Rome, the strange lone star Fomalhaut hung in its mighty solitude. Orion still was hunting in the far fields unseen.

"Was that all out of your own head?" said Bruno abruptly, as they mounted together under the pines.

"My own music? Yes."

"It is very fine," said Bruno, and was silent. His voice had lost its happy and hopeful intonation.

"Ah, if only I were sure," said Signa.

"It is very fine," repeated Bruno.

He knew it. He could not have told why. He had heard, like all his countryfolk, the gay grace of Rossini and Cimarosa, and the grave grace of Donizetti and Bellini, in the little dusky crowded theatres of the populace down in the city,

in all the seasons of autumn and carnival. It was only a pastime to him; a sport not fit to fill the life of a man. Music was like the grass—it grew everywhere. That was what he thought. But he knew that the songs of Signa were beautiful—knew it by the wet faces of the women, by the shining eyes of the men. And his heart was heavy with fear.

"Do they not tell you it is fine where you study?" he asked. "They must know there."

"Some do," said Signa, and then he hesitated, and his lips were mute.

"It is what you care most for—still?"

Signa drew a heavy breath.

"Ah, it is all I live for! Did I not say you have given me more than life—life eternal."

"What will be will be," said Bruno, with the old gloom deepening on his face. "It is not I, nor anyone. It is just that,—the thing that is to be."

"Fate," said the boy.

"Perhaps that is what you scholars call it," said the man. "It may be the great God, it may be the Devil."

"May it not be ourselves," said Signa, "or others?"

Bruno did not answer. His face was dark. He had neither mind nor mood to unravel thought, or unweave the subtleties of fancy. What he felt was that there was a force stronger than he, and always against him. It did not matter what it was called.

They walked on in silence slowly. The moon was gone, but all the stars were shining, and there was a little tremulous light on the moss under their feet. Signa stopped and lifted up a stone that had fallen across a few sprays of cyclamen, and raised up the drooping delicate pink heads of that most lovely and tender of all blossoms.

"Look!" he said. "My music was the cyclamen—circumstance was the stone; what my hand does for the mitre-flower, you did for my music and my life. I cannot call that Fate. It is something much warmer and much more beautiful to me."

"You talk like a poet," said Bruno, roughly. "I am an unlearned man. I cannot follow figures."

Signa threw the stone away, and went on without saying more.

When they had got to the house Bruno struck a match and lighted his brass lamp.

"Good night," he said, and would have gone to his bed, but Signa stopped him.

"I have something to say," he murmured. "Could we talk now? Something I came all the way on purpose to say—it could not be written."

"Ah!" said Bruno.

He sat down on the settle by the cold empty hearth. He drew his hat over his eyes. A dull, weary shadow was on his face. It seemed to him as if a knife went to his heart.

And he had said all through these three days to the people "He has walked all the way to see me—only just to see me!"

"Let us hear it," he said, and set down the lamp. He could not tell what it could be; but before he heard it all his hope died in him. The boy had not come for him, and the old life would not hold him.

Signa remained standing, leaning against the marriage-coffer.

"My music that you heard to-night," he said, softly. "That is from an opera I have written. The first — the only one. I have called it 'Actea.' Oh, you do not know; the story does not matter. She was the love of Nero, an Emperor of Rome, and she a slave. I have studied hard. Yes, indeed. It is not to praise myself. It was a happiness—no pain. If only one could learn more; but the nights and the days seem so short; even with sleeping only four hours. I have made all the opera myself. The music, of course, but the story of it and the words too—all the libretto. I would not speak to anyone of my idea, and if one be at all a musician, one should be just a little also of a poet; enough for that. There is the jealousy of Actea and Poppea, and the triumphs in the Circus Agonistes, and the martyrdom of the Christians, and Nero hearkening to the harping of Terpnos, and the death of Nero, and then Actea all alone by the grave; but you heard some of the music, all is said in that; I know that it is good. The great Father Polidria says so. He even says it is great. But it will not please the world; that

is what he says. He thinks that 'canterello' began with Rossini, who was great, and who had much else besides; and has descended to all the little composers that are reigning now, and who have nothing else besides, and, in so descending, has increased and grown worse, and has corrupted the ear of the people, so that they only want noise and glitter, and care nothing for true harmony or pure cadence. Perhaps it is thus. He should know. He says that the people in all the nations have lost their critical faculty and their understanding, and that even in *opera seria* they now desire as much jingling and noise and spectacle as in the *buffa*. And so he thinks that my 'Actea' would fail, because it has too much of Pergolese in it."

Bruno interrupted him:

"Tell me what you want; what you come for? I cannot understand all these long words."

"I am so sorry," said Signa, with the soft contrition of a chidden child. "I am always thinking of it; always talking of it; I forgot—I must tire you; but I hardly know what you will say, what you will think—listen. All my soul,

all my life, is in the opera. If only it could be heard I feel sure that it would make a great fame for me, and that is what you wish, is it not? You would not have me live and die an obscure musician, writing for little theatres or teaching song in the cities? Oh, no! Oh, my God, no! it would be better to work in the fields here for ever."

Bruno's teeth shut close together.

"I begin to understand—go on."

And sitting under the eaves of Fiastra that night, watching the young men and the maidens dance together, he had said in his heart, with security, "He is content. The old ways will hold him!"

"You know," said Signa, still leaning against the old gilded coffer, with his face in the glow from the lamp. "An opera to be known must be heard on some stage; and it must be a great stage; and the rendering of it good, or the music will have no chance to be great in the world. I have said nothing to you, because I hoped so much to send you word of some great victory for it, all in a moment, while you were thinking of

me as only a little scholar. But the 'Actea' was finished in spring, and I managed to travel to Milan,—never mind how, walking most of the way,—and there I played from it, and showed it to many directors that come to the city, the score of it is in my knapsack there, and they have all wondered at me, and called me Mozart, and said that the music was good, some even said great; and the death chant of the Christians, and the grave song of Actea, they said were sublime. But they were all afraid of it. They all thought it too serious, too passionate, too thoughtful. I suppose it has not 'canterello' enough. They said it would cost much, and would almost certainly fail to please. They are afraid of their money—afraid to spend it, and not to see it again. It is that everywhere, money. It has half broken my heart. To hear them say that it is beautiful, they all grant that, and yet to find not one there that will have the courage to give it to the world! I have seen them, of all nations, and it is always the same. 'You are a young genius, you are a Mozart,' they all say. Oh heaven! how would ever anyone have known

of Mozart if they had all dealt with him as these men deal with me!"

Bruno looked up.

"Poor lad!" he muttered; the thought of Signa, suppliant and repulsed, moved him; he hated the music that thus enchained the boy's soul; but he hated as much those traffickers in the labour of the brain, who had made him suffer.

Signa went on full of his own thought.

"They told me I should take a homelier theme, with tragedy in it, like the Gazza Ladra; as if the meanness of the plot were not what destroys the beautiful music there! They were all afraid of my Actea. Oh, you do not know what I have endured. The hope of it, the despair of it, the waiting, the longing, the beseeching, the thinking every time 'Here is one who will understand;' and then always the same disappointment at the end. I have been sick with the pain of it, mad with it; but you must not think that I lied to you when I said I was happy. I have been happy always, because I believe in my genius: I do believe in it against everything. It is not vanity. I love the opera; but I love

it as if God gave it me. It comes out of me just like the song out of the bird. No more. All the summer I have toiled after these men, one or other of them; the city of Milan is full of them; getting singers, and players, and melodies for their theatres, all over the world, for the next winter. I have lost weeks and months waiting, waiting, waiting; and often all day without a bit of anything to eat, because they do not think—those people—or because they do not know one is so poor. I suppose they never want for food themselves, and so forget."

"You never told us."

Bruno's voice was husky: his face was dark with troubled pain. When he had thought this young life so happy and so tranquil and so safe, it had been in conflict and torment, beating against the buffets of the world. He was bewildered; he had a dull sense of having failed in all that he had done; failed utterly.

"Oh, no, what was the use?" said Signa, "It was no fault of anyone's: things are so, if one have not money. You gave me all you could. I thought the 'Actea' would be taken at once. I

thought that I should send you word of my triumphs while you were still all thinking me a little useless scholar. But it was not to be. If they could say that I wrote ill, I could bear it. Yes, I would tear it all up, and think the failure was in me, and study more, and do better; but they cannot say that. The work that I have done is good. The coldest of them own it. Oh heaven! it is that that breaks my heart: all my life is in it. I would die this hour, oh, so gladly, if I could be quite sure that my music would be loved, and be remembered. I do not know: there can be nothing like it, I think:—a thing you create, that is all your own, that is the very breath of your mouth, and the very voice of your soul; which is all that is best in you, the very gift of God; and then to know that all this may be lost eternally, killed, stifled, buried, just for want of men's faith and a little gold! I do not think there can be any loss like it, nor any suffering like it, anywhere else in the world. Oh, if only it would do any good, I would fling my body into the grave to-morrow, happy, quite happy; if only afterwards, they would sing my songs, all

over the earth, and just say, 'God spoke to him; and he has told men what He said.'"

His hand clenched as he paused, his eyes burned, his face changed, and his mouth quivered: the madness of a great passion was in him—the pure impersonal hero-passion of genius, which only reigns absolute in earliest youth, and whose death-note is human love.

Bruno looked at him darkly, drearily.

This was the boy that he had thought had walked all the way only to look on his own face, and that he had thought had only cared for his old home, and come to live for ever on the calm hillside! What could he understand of this impassioned spiritual pain?—he was like a man watching a delirium that raves in an unknown tongue.

Between them there was that bottomless chasm of mental difference, across which mutual affection can throw a rope-chain of habit and forbearance for the summer days, but which no power on earth can ever bridge with that iron of sympathy which stands throughout all storms.

"I cannot follow—all that," he muttered,

wearily. "You go beyond me. No doubt you are born for greater things than I know. It is dark to me. But you came here for something —some wish, some aid—tell me that. Perhaps I can help you. But I am ignorant. I cannot understand all that you say. Tell me the thing you want. I am better at acts than at thoughts."

Signa, recalled to himself, hesitated a moment: then he spoke, with the colour changing on his bent down face.

"Well—all the hot months I have waited on these men. Waited and waited, all to no good. They are all afraid. Perhaps they think in their hearts that a boy like me—yesterday a peasant, and still with my shirts in holes, and only nineteen years old—perhaps they think I never can be really worth the great world's hearing. Anyhow—they refuse. All refuse. 'Have it played in your own country, and then we will see,' say the foreign ones. 'This country is too poor to risk uncertain ventures in it,' say our own people. It is always some excuse. Some way they are afraid; of me or of the music. And

then no one cares very much to risk new music. The theatres fill with the Ballo in Maschera and the Cenerentola, and all the rest. They only want them to fill. That is all. Nothing is to be done with them. 'Comte Ory brings me as much as your Actea would were it successful,' said one director to me. 'And I have all the Comte Ory decorations, and all the singers know it by heart; why should I risk what might be half my ruin?' For music they do not care, these men. No more than the men who sell wine in the wine-shops care for the beauty of the vines. But now—only I do not know what you will say, you will think me mad;—now, last week in Milan, I have found a director who would take the Actea. Yes, take it, and bring it out in Carnival in Venice. In Venice—where they made Rossini's fame, and sang the Ti rivedro even in the courts of law! I do not know whether he is a good man or a bad. But I would have kissed his feet. For he believes in the Actea——"

"Well?" said Bruno, as he paused.

Signa's face flushed hotter, then grew very pale.

"He will bring it out, this coming Carnival!" he murmured. "Only, as the risk is great, he says—he must have from me, before he does commence it, three thousand francs, one half the cost of it on his theatre."

"From you?" Bruno looked at him, doubting his own senses.

"From me, yes;" said Signa, and faltered a moment, and then threw himself at the feet of Bruno, with that caressing, suppliant grace of action which makes an Italian bend his knee as naturally as a flower stoops before the wind.

"Oh, listen! You have been so generous, so good, so long-suffering—it is a shame to ask for more, to trespass further. Yes, I know. But, oh, listen to me, just this once again. What is the use of life in me if I cannot make men hear my music? I feel I am strong; I feel I am right; I feel what I do is great—only I have not the means of success in this world. Just see a skylark, the bird that mounts, mounts, mounts, ever singing; if it had a stone at its foot it could not mount, and so it could not sing, and

yet its song would be in it just the same, and it would break its heart because it had to be mute. I am like the skylark:—only the stone with me is poverty. You see they have all had some little money. Mozart had his father's help, and Haydn Prince Esterhazy's, and every-one of them, some little thing just to loosen the stone off their foot as they rose first;—and once risen, then no lark wants anything more than only just the air and his own two wings. Now—oh, I know it is so much to ask, and in a way it is shameful; but you love me and I have no one but you. Now—that land you bought for me, you send me the worth from it always, and you mean to sign it away to me when I am of age, and you would like me to live on it for ever. Now — now — would it be impossible; would it be wicked in me to pray for it;—would you sell it at once, sell it straight away to who-ever would buy it, the fields and the olives and all; and give me the money for the Actea? Ah, my God!—do do it! My life is worth nothing to me, and what should ever I do with the land? It is yours I know, and I have no

right yet;—but if you do still mean to give it to me, let me have the value of it now—now, for the Actea, and deliver me out of this torture and give me a chance to be great. Ah, my God, do hear me!—it will be as if you ransomed me out of hell!"

His head dropped on his hands; he sobbed aloud; he knelt still at Bruno's feet, but all drooped into himself like a crushed flower. He was ashamed of his own prayer; and yet the passion of his longing shook him from head to foot. What use were the land, and the olives, and the rush-shadowed brook to him? What he wanted was fame eternal.

Bruno was silent.

This was why the boy had come back.

After awhile Signa lifted his head timidly and glanced upward. Bruno's face told him nothing: it was dark as a tempest, and, under all its bronze hue, pale; but it said nothing: it was like a moonless night.

The boy was afraid. He thought there would break upon him an outburst of such rage as had shattered his lost Rusignuolo.

But none came. Bruno was quite calm and was mute.

"Will you do it?" said Signa, with a great fear at his heart, touching the man's brown hands with a soft, shy supplication like a girl's. "Will you do it? See, you are so strong, so good—you think so much of my body, and my peace, and my happiness; which all are as nothing to me: will you help me to save my soul? will you help me out from this death in life? Dear God! if you knew—"

A terrible hopelessness seized him and stopped his prayer on his lips. Bruno's face was so dark and so still: there was no response in it. A ghastly despair froze the boy's beating heart.

How could he ever make this man understand —this man who knew nothing—this man who followed his oxen, and reaped his corn, and was content?

Bruno rose.

"I will think of it," he said, slowly; and his voice in the darkness and the stillness of the lamplit house, sounded deep and hollow, as a brave bell that is broken will sound. "I will

do it—if I see it for your good. I must think."

Then he went out into the night air and drew the house door behind him, and the boy heard the echo of his footsteps passing away upward to the higher hills.

He knew that his prayer would be fulfilled. He did not know that for one single instant as he had knelt there, Bruno could have struck him down and stamped his life out with as passionate a hate as he had once stamped the music out of the broken violin:—one instant in which the heart of the man had risen and cried against him:

"I have given you all my life—and you bring me back a stone."

The next day early Bruno went down into the Lastra. He went to the sacristy of the Misericordia.

"Write to this man of Venice," he said briefly. "Have it all in black and white: what he has said, what he will do."

Luigi Dini looked up astonished.

"What! He has told you! You mean——?"

"We can speak of it when the answer comes. Write," said Bruno, and went out into the tender sunshine and through the merry ways of the Lastra, that were overflowing with gathered grapes and laughing faces, down into the city, to the house of the notary who had served him in the transfer from Baccio Alessi, the carver.

"I may wish to sell my land—that land—in a little while," he said. "If you find an honest man at a fair price, tell me."

The notary looked up as the sacristan had done.

"Sell the land! The land you were so proud of! What can that be for?"

"That is no concern of any man's. When you find the bidder tell me," said Bruno, and went into the great square, where, the day being the market-day, all the men from the villages and the villas were chaffering together with sonorous resonant voices, raised high in dispute or discussion.

"Bruno is going to do some evil thing," said the other men, seeing the look upon his face. They had been used to tell danger from the dark-

ness of his face, as storm from the cloud-crown of Monte Morello.

But he did no evil. He trafficked with them, driving his bargains closely, and giving few words to all, with the glaive of Perseus and the bronze head of the Medusa above him in the shadow of the arch.

When the day was ended, he entered the baptistery, and prayed there in the twilight.

Then he crossed the river, and went out of the gates homeward.

More than one man, going by with swift wheels and little jingling bells, and flying fox-tails at the pony's harness, stopped and offered him a lift; but he shook his head, and strode on along in the dust.

It was the twenty-fourth hour—the close of day—when he reached the foot of his own hill. The sun was just going down behind the great mountain and the sharp peaks that lie between the valley and the sea. It was nearly dark when he had mounted high enough to see his own roof above the olives.

He passed Fiastra.

The bell that said, "Lavora: et noli contristari" was ringing loud.

On the path above there was a little tumult of young men and girls running merrily one on another to reach the open gates. They had torches with them, flaming bright in the dusk, and branches of fir and boughs of the vines that they tossed over their heads; they were shouting and leaping, and scampering, and singing in chorus. As they drew near the farmhouse, they called out to the people within:

"We have brought him down!—we have got him! We will make him sing—our own little Signa, who is going to be so great!"

Four of the youths had Signa aloft on their shoulders. They had sought him out where he was moping in solitude, as they termed it; and had besought him and besieged him with airy laughter and fervent entreaty, and a thousand appeals and reproaches of old friends to one who deserted them; and he had not been proof against all that kindly flattery, all that tender supplication, which had the honey in it of the first homage that he had

ever known; and they had borne him away in triumph, and the girls had crowned him with vine leaves and the damask roses that blossom in hazel and grape time, and danced round him in their rough, simple glee, like the peasants of Tempe round the young Apollo.

Bruno drew back into the shadow of the pines, and let them pass by him. They did not see him. They went dancing and singing down the steep grass paths, and under the archway, into the courtyard of Fiastra.

It was a quaint, vivid, pretty procession, full of grace and of movement—classic and homely, pagan and mediæval, both at once—bright in hue, rustic in garb, poetic in feeling.

Teniers might have painted the brown girls and boys leaping and singing on the turf, with their brandishing boughs, their flaring torches, their bare feet, their tossing arms; but Leonardo or Guercino would have been wanted for the face of the young singer whom they carried, with the crown of the leaves and of the roses on his drooped head, like the lotus flowers on the young Antinous.

Piero di Cosimo, perhaps, in one of his greatest moments of brilliant caprice, might best have painted the whole, with the background of the dusky hillside; and he would have set it round with strange arabesques in gold, and illumined amongst them in emblem the pipe of the shepherd, and the harp of the muse, and the river-rush that the gods would cut down and fill with their breath and the music of heaven.

Bruno stood by, and let the innocent pageant pass, with its gold of autumn foliage and its purples of crocus-like colchicum.

He heard their voices crying in the court: "We have got him—we have brought him. Our Signa, who is going to be great!"

He stood still a little while: then he went up to his own home, and lit his lantern, and foddered his cattle, and worked in his sheds. He was too far off from Fiastra to hear any sound of the singing, but every now and then the wind, which blew that day from the south-east, brought upward the bursts of applause, the enthusiastic shouts, that succeeded the intervals of silence: mere murmurs as the wind brought them; but to

Bruno they sounded like the echo of the clarion of Fame, crying aloud to him from the great world, "He is mine."

It was late when Signa returned, brought back by the young men, who left him with caress and with gratitude as to a creature far above them, and went away singing low amongst themselves in chorus the greatest air that he had written, the chant of the dying Christians, which had in it all the majestic magnificence of the "Rex tremendæ majestatis," and all the pathetic resignation of the "Huic ergo parce Deus," of Mozart's "Dies Iræ."

Signa stood on the threshold and listened to the broad, regular periods the sonorous pathetic rhythm of his requiem, as the voices rose and sank, and grew fainter and fainter, as the steps fell away down the hillside.

They were only peasants, only labourers of the flail and the furrow; but they could sing whatever took their ear with unerring truth and time. It was the first time that ever he had heard any music of his own upon the mouths of others: it was the first time that any of that sympathy,

which is the sweetest part of public homage, had ever come to him :—he stood and listened with a tumultuous pleasure swelling at his heart, and a delicious sense of power on the lives of others stirring in him.

"It will live," he murmured to himself, as he listened there on the threshold until the voices died into silence, as the young men went on their several ways to their own homesteads, and parted.

Bruno was working still in one of the sheds, his lantern burning beside him. He had been sifting grain, stacking wood, cleaning wine casks, with the white dog watching him and the night wearing away.

Signa went within, and stood by him a little timidly. He had not seen him that day, save for a few moments in the early morning.

"You did not come to Fiastra to-night," he said gently, not knowing well what to say.

"No," said Bruno, without lifting his head, whilst he piled the brush-wood.

"Are you angry with me?" said Signa,

with the child-like way that was natural to him.

"No," said Bruno, but he worked on without raising his head.

Signa's mouth quivered a little. He knew that he had done no wrong, and yet he was not at peace with himself.

"Perhaps I am very selfish to ask so much," he said, hesitating a little as he spoke. "I know I have no right; I know I have no more of my own than the dog there. But, indeed—indeed—what use would the land be to me? what joy would it bring me? And you are so good."

Bruno paused in his labour a moment.

"I said: I must think. Let it be. Wait a week—then I will tell you. I do not know that you are selfish. It is I, more likely. I will do what is for your good. Only leave me in peace. Do not talk."

And he lifted more wood.

Signa stood by him sadly. He was not satisfied. He knew that he had gained what he wished, that his desire would be given him. But his victory brought a sense of pain and of wrong-

doing, as victory over a noble foe does to a soldier.

Bruno could never measure the height of the boy's intelligence; the boy could never measure the depth of Bruno's nature. In some ways they were for ever both strangers one to the other. Between human creatures it is often so.

As he stood there, confused, troubled, mute, Bruno looked up with a gesture of impatience, and laid his hand on the lad's shoulder, but gently, for since the day of the broken Rusignuolo he had sworn to heaven never to be ungentle with Pippa's son.

"I am not angered," he said. "But leave me alone. Go with your friends; sing, dance, be caressed, take your pastime; enjoy yourself, dear, while you can. Do not think that you have hurt me: only leave me alone. It is not a thing to be done in a day. But you may trust me. What is best for you, that I will do: only I will not talk of it."

He thrust him still gently out of the shed into the night air against the open house-door.

"It is late. Go to your bed."

CHAPTER XVI.

SIGNA went, and climbed up to his own room, and opened the old drawer and looked at his broken violin lying where he had left it, with its rosemary and its sprigs of cypress, as if it were a dead thing in a coffin.

"Perhaps the world will prize you some day," he thought, "as it does the old wooden shoe of Paganini."

He was happy because he had faith in himself, and hope; almost as happy as when the fair angel had given him the Rusignuolo; but he had a heavy sense amidst his joy of having sinned against Bruno.

He only partly understood the pain that he had dealt. He only dimly saw how the man who had believed that his return had been one of affection

was wounded to the quick by the revelation that ambition and personal desire and immediate need had been the sole impulses moving him. He only very vaguely comprehended that to ask Bruno to give up the land which he had slaved for seven years to gain, was to shatter at a blow all the pride of his days, all the hope of his life.

The great genius overmastering him was like a cloud before his eyes. If he were cruel to Bruno, he was cruel unconsciously; as he was cruel to his own body in inflicting on it hunger and cold and all corporal ills whilst he followed the spirits that beckoned to him.

If he asked Bruno to give up much, he himself was ready to give up everything. If it could have been said to him, "Die now, and your music shall live," he would have accepted the alternative without a pause, and gone to his death rejoicing.

It was the sublime fanaticism of genius, which, like all other fanaticism, is cruel. The desire for glory had entered into him, as yet impersonal, but none the less all-absorbing and dominant.

Once he had been content to have leisure and

rest, to hear the "beautiful things" of his fancy. Now he had no peace unless he could repeat them to the world of men:—as at first the lover is content with the perfect possession of his mistress; but, when this has been enjoyed awhile in secret, grows restless for the world to know the joy that crowns his passions.

The days passed away with him in a fever of unrest, eating little, sleeping little, vaguely consoled and elated by the homage his old comrades gave him, but missing much of the beauty of autumn, because the unrest of ambition was in him. The little mitre-flower would not tell him half the things it had whispered him in his childhood, and the great winds wandering amongst the pines had lost much of their melody for him. He was always thinking—"Will they kill my soul in me? Shall I die unheard and unknown?"

Palma came up no more to Fiastra: she stayed down in her father's house, washing, mending, ironing, scrubbing, hoeing, toiling.

"I am nothing to him," she said to herself. "If I had been Gemma, he would have made his songs about me."

Signa strayed sometimes into Giovoli, indeed, as he went to old Teresina's and other places that he had known; but he was always thinking, thinking—always absorbed; sometimes seeming to listen, and then writing music on any scrap of paper from his pocket, and at other times singing over softly to himself the recitatives and the airs of his 'Actea.'

The two weeks of uncertainty were torture to him. His hope and fear were in equal portions, and each possessed him by turns to all exclusion of the other.

"I thank heaven, lad, you did fail at the school of design in the city, and came home to make honest tubs and churns and buckets," said Cecco, the cooper, to his own youngest son, in the workshop with the vine behind the barred window.

They all had a dim sense that Signa was going to be great; but they most of them thought it a bad thing, and pitied him, and pitied Bruno for not having a good, strong, contented youth, who would have helped him with the land and held it after him.

As for Bruno himself, he never spoke to any man of the boy or of the land.

Letters came and went. Luigi Dini and the notary, who was a good man and kindly, puzzled the matter out together, and dealt with it cautiously and carefully. Weeks went by with all things unsettled. At length the sacristan called Bruno down into the Lastra, and said to him :—

" The man of Venice is an honest man. There is no fear. If the half of the cost be paid, he will produce the work in carnival and do it all justice. There is no fear. He will not say it will succeed, but he will give the test. He is a true man, as such men go, living by their own wits and the brains of others."

Bruno shaded his eyes with his hand a few minutes; then he nodded his head to the old man, and drove to the city, and said to the notary, " Sell the land."

The notary had some time before found with ease a man who was willing and able to buy—money down, with no faltering or pilfering.

" The deeds shall be ready by the week's end,"

he said now; and he sent and called in the buyer, a stranger to Bruno and a dweller in the city; and they shook hands on the bargain, and it was concluded beyond possibility of change.

Bruno did not speak once.

"Does he sell under pressure of debt, that he looks so dark? It is whispered about," said the buyer.

"Then a lie is whispered about," said the notary. "He sells because he chooses to sell. And it is his way to look like that."

But the notary thought to himself, "The man is a fool. The boy has a pipe like a chaffinch, and so the good land is to go in a puff of sound. The boy must be his own, or he would never do so foolishly."

For the notary, though he dealt with the letters to and from the city of Venice because he was paid to do so, and it was no business of his, was sincerely sorry that the solid soil was being bartered away for a lad's silly dream, and was sorry, moreover, for Bruno.

"It will all end in vapour, and the boy will die in a garret. It is always so," said the notary,

though his own dwelling-house was close against a wall on which was written "Qui nacque Cherubini."

Bruno returned to his own hills in the stormy autumnal evening, and entered his own house.

Signa was sitting by the oil-lamp writing music. He seldom did any other thing. His hand on the dark oak table was white and small as a girl's; his cheeks were flushed with a feverish colour; he looked weak, and he was very thin.

Bruno went up behind him and laid both his hands on his shoulders. He did not care for the boy to look up at his face.

"Dear, it is done," he said gently. "You have got your desire. Your music will be heard in the winter. Ask Luigi Dini the rest."

Then he left the room, and locked himself in the loft above the stable of Tinello and Pastore. He could not trust himself to speak more. All the night he had no sleep.

He went out again before daybreak, while the stars were still shining.

He went out and upward to the little brook

rushing away under its reeds, to the three little fields corn-sown, to the narrow grassy paths under the gnarled olives.

Kings leaving their kingdoms have suffered less than he, losing this shred of land.

Nine years he had laboured on it, giving it the sweat of his brow and the ache of his limbs, and all the stolen hours that other workers gave to rest or pleasure; and now it was going from him as sand runs out of a glass.

All the toil was over and useless. All the nine years were passed like a breath of smoke, and left no more tale or worth.

He sat down by the edge of the bright shallow water. It was now close upon daybreak. No sound stirred, upward or downward, on the great hill.

He was quite quiet. He had the dull dark look on his face that had come there when the boy had first asked this gift at his hands. He said to himself, that what befell him was just. On that spot by the rippling burn he had shattered the boy's treasure: it was only meet now that he should lose his own.

He did not waver. He did not repine. He made no reproach, even in his own thoughts. He had only lost all the hope out of his life and all the pride of it.

But men lose these and live on; women also.

He had built up his little kingdom out of atoms, little by little; atoms of time, of patience, of self-denial, of hoarded coins, of snatched moments:—built it up little by little, at cost of bodily labour and of bodily pain, as the pyramids were built brick by brick by the toil and the torment of unnoticed lives.

It was only a poor little nook of land, but it had been like an empire won to him.

With his foot on its soil he had felt rich.

He had wondered that men lived who spent their souls in envy.

It had been his ambition, his longing, his dream, his victory: labour for it had been as sweet to him as the kisses of love; and when he had made it all his own, he would not have changed places with princes or with cardinals.

And now it was gone—gone like a handful of thistledown lost on the winds, like a spider's web

broken in a shower of rain. Gone: never to be his own again. Never.

He sat and watched the brook run on, the pied-birds come to drink, the throstle stir on the olive, the cloud shadows steal over the brown, bare fields.

The red flush of sunrise faded. Smoke rose from the distant roofs. Men came out on the lands to work. Bells rang. The day began.

He got up slowly and went away; looking backwards, looking backwards, always.

Great leaders who behold their armed hosts melt like snow, and great monarchs who are driven out discrowned from the palaces of their fathers, are statelier figures and have more tragic grace than he had;—only a peasant leaving a shred of land, no bigger than a rich man's dwelling-house will cover;—but vanquished leader or exiled monarch never was more desolate than Bruno, when the full sun rose and he looked his last look upon the three poor fields, where forever the hands of other men would labour, and forever the feet of other men would wander.

CHAPTER XVII.

On the morrow, the notary in the city saw duly signed and sealed and attested the deed which gave the land by the brook on the hill, that is called Artemino, over, from Brunone Marcillo, to one Aurelio Avellino, cheese-seller, in the street of the Red Gate in fair Florence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a winter's night in the Lastra.

The cold had been severe. It was the first month of the young year. Snow was resting on the barbecane and watch-towers of the Porta Fiorentina and on the ledges and battlements of all the old walls. It melted every morning when the noon sun touched it, but it lay there every night. The villas were all deserted. The nobles were down in their palaces in the city. The little churches rang their bells regularly over the barren solitary country, like soldiers firing over a forsaken field. The rivers were swollen, but had not overflowed; every little thread of water was swelled into a brook and every hill-fed brook into a torrent. The people were hard pressed at times for food and oil. There was a good deal of

suffering in the little homesteads: most of all in those set high on the hillsides and the mountain crests, that were swept by the bitter fierce winds from the north, where the dwellers could see no faces save those of their own households, until spring should have come and made the mule-tracks passable again.

Even down in the Lastra things were not very bright; for the people are poor, and the taxes are many.

It was high carnival in the great towns, but they had not much to do with that. Now and then some groups of men and girls went down to join the mummery in the city with masks on and ribbons fluttering, and came back white, not with snow, but with the flour-pelting; and for the midnight fair, under the gallery of the Medici, the contadini dressed up their wine barrels in quaint guise, and the straw-plaiters took their prettiest baskets and tassels and hats and toys, and the best looking maidens went down with the best winter fruits, to stand and laugh behind the flaring torches under the evergreens and the flags, and, perhaps,

have a waltz and a scamper down the broad pavement, with the stars shining above and the tambourines and cymbals clashing, and the Vecchio Tower frowning on the pastime and the blaze.

Otherwise the Lastra had nothing to do with carnival, except that now and then it put a fat goose in its pot, or munched a bit of toothsome strong bread from Siena, or had a set of strolling players in the old Loggia that used to be a hospital in the days when Antonino preached charity as the saving of men, and uprooted his damask rose-trees in the eternal antagonism of Theology and Nature.

It was a winter's night in the Lastra.

It was the first night of the midnight winefair in the city and the noisiest folks were away. In the wineshop, however, of one, Sanfranco, a good merry man and a son-in-law of old Teresina, a score or more of people, men and women, were gathered.

The great wooden nail-studded doors of the arched entrance were shut to against the driving wind. The oil wicks flamed brightly, though they could only dimly light up the dark-vaulted

cavern-like entrance room; but long branches of trees flamed on the dogs, and Sanfranco sold good wine, and his wife was a popular soul and made the best maccaroni in the commune, and a bough outside his door always showed that hunger as well as thirst might be allayed within.

At the moment no one was eating or drinking. The straw-covered flasks stood about unnoticed. The pipes had grown cold.

Old Teresina, who was at supper with them, had her distaff idle and both hands on her knees, as she strained her ears to hearken. Men and women sat and leaned around in various postures, but all with the same stillness and intentness, listening. Sanfranco himself forgot to chalk the scores of the night; and his wife, for once, let her frying-pan frizzle itself into blackness. They were all gathered together in absorbed attention.

The sacristan of the Misericordia sat in their midst: his spectacles were on his nose, his three-wicked lamp burned close at his elbow: he had a newspaper in his hands, and other papers crumbled at his feet. He had been reading aloud

sometime; his glasses were dim with mist, his voice faltered, and his sight almost failed him; for this was what he read:

"What shall we say of this child? For he is no more than a child. Rossini was twenty-one when Venice first welcomed, with one voice, his mighty 'Tancred.' This lad is even younger. We predict for him a fame even greater than Rossini's. Since our grandfathers worshipped Cimarosa, there has been no parallel to the rapture of this city at the 'Actea.' The grave song of Actea is on every woman's lips to-day; the death chant of the Christian is echoed by every gondolier. All the air and all the waters seem full of this new music, which, to the most perfect freshness of fancy unites the severe grace and sonorous harmony of Durante and Pergolese. If it have a fault at all, it is too pure. It has the passions of faith, of heroism, of aspiration; it has not the passion of love; it belongs to the soul; it has passed by the senses. This is the result of his youth. It is more divine than it is anything else. But its exquisite beauty, its truth to all the requirements of the noblest musical art,

above all, its real sublimity of conception have carried all before it. There has been no such scene as that of last night in Venice since Rossini's *Aria di Rizzi* rose on every tongue. All the city was in tumult. Men and women wept like children. From the first act, which opens with the chorus of the gladiators, to the last, which closes on the grave of Nero, there was not for one moment doubt or coldness in the audience. Its reception was an ever-increasing tempest of delight. Men who had gone listless and even hostile were overborne and carried away by the universal enthusiasm. The young artist could not be found at the moment the opera commenced. When the second act had passed, and such a shout as might have wakened the very dead, shook the house from floor to roof, he was found hidden in one of the dark unused passages below the stage. He had fainted——"

The old man paused; his voice was choked with emotion; he let the paper fall at his feet.

The men gave a deep glad cry; the women sobbed aloud.

"My pupil! yes, I may call him that," mur-

mured Luigi Dini. "I taught him all he knew —at first."

Then he took up the printed sheets, and went on with his slow measured reading,—

"When at length he came before the people, he looked more like some beautiful pale young ghost of Desdemona or of Francesca, than like a youth who had fought his battle with the world —and conquered. When all was over, the people got hold of him, clambering on the boards to reach him, and carried him aloft on their shoulders, and bore him out into the air, smothered with the flowers and the handkerchiefs of women. A whole fleet of gondolas accompanied him homewards. The great chant had caught the ear of the whole city. The nobles of Venice seized him, and bore him away to a brilliant feast. They sang it as they took him to his home. They sang it under the windows. They brought him out again, and again, and again. The night rang with their cheers, and with the echoes of his music. It was not until morning that anything like order or stillness prevailed. Like the southern poet who loved Venice so well,

he awakes, and finds himself famous. It is said that he is a little contadino, the son of a contadino also, in a village in Tuscany, and that all the study he has ever had has been a year or two in Bologna. It is said, too, that his friends are so poor, and he so penniless, that yesterday he had not a coin to buy himself a crust of bread. He calls himself only Signa."

Luigi Dini caught his breath a moment, and his withered lips quivered.

"They then pass on to speak of the music, critically, and in detail," he said, striving to seem calm. "You will not care to hear that. It is too long. But you see—we were no idle dreamers, no mere weavers of cobwebs. You see—my boy is great."

"My little Signa, that I hid in the coffer!" cried old Teresina, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, yet laughing in her joy.

"Little Signa, that Nita beat like a dog!" said her daughter, laughing and crying too.

"Little Signa, that thought it such a fine thing to have a bowl of soup with the children on Sundays!" said Sanfranco himself.

"Little Signa, that we thought no better than a baby!" said his son, a strong, lusty, young blacksmith.

"Little Signa, that is only Pippa's son!" said Cecco, the cooper. "Only Pippa's son! and that baseborn."

"Little Signa no more," said Luigi Dini; "and baseborn? what does that matter? God has called him into the light of the world."

"Will he ever look back to us?" murmured the old woman, with the slow tears falling down on her hank of flax.

"Never mind. We will look up at him," said the old man, gently. "But I do not think he will forget. We do not think the stars see us in the daytime, but if we go down into a well, we see that they do, just the same: so will it be with him. The great light may hide him from our sight, but he will see us all the same."

They were all silent.

"Did he write anything himself?" said Cecco, the cooper, after a pause.

"He wrote, 'Tell Bruno,' and sent me all these papers. That was all."

"Bruno!" echoed the cooper, who was his friend.

They had none of them thought of Bruno.

"Poor Bruno," said the old man, sadly; he was thinking of the price that Bruno had paid for the night of victory in Venice.

"You cannot go up to him to-night," said Sanfranco; "the hill-paths are perilous."

"No. The post came so late too, from the state of the roads. I will go up the first thing in the morning."

"Perhaps he will be in here to-night. I think he went through to the wine-fair. I think he had to go—yes, he said so."

"Yes, he said so," echoed Cecco. "But only to take wine to Savio's stall. He will not stay."

"Does he expect to hear this news at all?"

"Not at all," said the sacristan. "The man of Venice has dealt so ill with the lad, putting off, putting off, till here is nigh the close of the carnival. We began to think that he would cheat us utterly. He had a ballet that ran well.

He did not care. No. Bruno had ceased to hope. 'What is done is done;' that is all he has ever said about it."

"It is a wonderful glory!" said the woman. "Read us again. Read us again, good Luigi."

And he read again, the story which already he knew so well by heart, that it mattered little that his eyes swam so often, and that the printed letters were wrapped in mist.

As he read this second time, the heavy iron-beaded door swung open, letting in a blast of bitter frosted air, that almost blew the lights out: a man came into the room, shaking snow at each step on to the red bricks, and muffled in his thick brown cloak, wearing it across his chest and his mouth, in the same fashion that Dante and Guido Calvacanti once did theirs.

It was Bruno.

His baroccino stood without, with the mule tired and cold, and the candle dark in the lantern that swung from the shafts. He had deposited the wine at Salvio's stall, and had come away, leaving to others the riot, and dance, and glee, and jest, and mumming, and masking of

the great carnival fair, under the arches of the galleries on the edge of the Arno.

In many a bye-gone year he had been the wildest there; with rough jests over the sale of the wine, and rough wooing of the women's torch-lit graces, and mad dancing with black dominoes and rainbow-hued maskers, while the drums and flutes had resounded through the great arcade till the daylight broke.

"Sanfranco, will you give me a light?" said he, coming into the midst of them with the rush of cold air; "mine is gone out, and the frost makes the hills bad driving."

Then his sight fell on the sacristan with the printed paper, and he glanced over all the faces of the others, and read them.

He strode up to the old man.

"There is news of him?" he said, under his breath, with passionate thirsty eyes.

"Yes, great and good news," said Luigi Dini; but his feeble voice was drowned in the deep shouts of the men, and the women's shrill cries, each eager to tell the tale the quickest, and to be the first.

"Great and good news!" they clamoured. "All Venice is mad for him, Bruno. He has taken the city by storm. The people have feasted him, and chanted him all the night long. Only think! only think! Just our own little Signa. Just Pippa's son—as you say. He is great. He is famous. He has all the world after him. Only think! only think!"

Bruno stood in the centre of them, the snow falling in flakes off his garments, his eyes turning bewildered from one to another. Then he put his hand up before his sight, like a man blinded with a sudden blaze of light. It was so hard to understand. It was so hard to conceive as possible.

"Do they laugh at the boy? or at me?" he muttered, with the anger of a sudden suspicion awakening in the flash of his glance.

"No, no! No, no!" said Luigi Dini; "who would have the heart to make a mock of it? And what is there so strange? It is what we hoped and prayed for, only it passes beyond all our prayers. The lad is great—yes, do not look so. The dear child is great, and his future is

safe. God is good; and you sold the land not in vain."

Bruno dropped down on a bench that stood near.

"God is good," he muttered.

They were all silent. They could not shout and chatter and praise and wonder any more. There was that in his intense stillness which overmastered and awed them.

Whether it were pain or thankfulness they could not tell. Whichever it was, it was beyond them.

Sanfranco was the first to speak. He touched Bruno on the arm.

"Stay here in the warm and let him read you the news—such news! We have heard it twice over, but we can well bear it thrice. I will see to your beast. Do not go back to the hills this rare night. We ought to have a bonfire on the roof of the big gate. Stay with us."

Bruno rose to his feet, still with that unsteady dazzled look on him like a man wakened by a blaze of fire.

"No," he said, absently. "No;—see to the

mule—he is cold and lame;—come away with me, Luigi. Let me hear—all alone."

The old sacristan made a gesture to the others to be quiet and cease from their pressing; and gathered up all the papers.

"Yes. We will go to my quiet little room. It will be best," he said, and put his hand on Bruno's arm and guided him out of the doorway into the dark freezing night. It was but a stone's throw to the sacristy. Bruno went out like a blind man.

Sanfranco followed them, and put up the mule in his stable.

"One would think he was not glad after all," said he to his wife, returning.

"Nay, he is glad and thankful," said his old mother-in-law, who was clipping an oil wick. "If it had not been for his labour, who would ever have heard of the dear little lad? But—look you—the stars may see us in the day, as Luigi says, mayhap they do; but if a star were all one had to love, it would be hard work to feel the loneliness and the cold close in, and sit in the dark water of the well and only catch a glimpse of the

star now and then shining ever so far away up in the light of the sun—and we out of the light for ever."

"That is true, mother," said Sanfranco. "But you talk like a book."

"Nay, nay, never so;—I talk sense," said the old Teresina. "But that is how it will always be with Bruno and Pippa's boy; just the well and the star,—just the well and the star—do you see?"

"I see," said Cecco, the cooper, who loved Bruno; and he emptied half a flask of wine.

The grey dawn came into the little room by the Misericordia Church, with the black cross-bones and the memento mori everywhere about it, and beyond its lattice the old broken battlements and the dull winter skies.

He had it all read to him—over and over again. He sat leaning against the table with his head on his hands.

He understood it all; he understood it—the fame of the arts is that which is most intelligible to the peasants of this country, those descendants

of the men who ran weeping and laughing before Cimabue, and filled the churches to hearken to the oratorios of S. Philip Neri.

They understand it by instinct.

So did he. But it was still like a sudden blaze of flame, so close to his face that whilst he was dazzled by it his eyes were darkened and sightless.

Was he thankful?—yes, he thanked God. God was good. So he said from the depths of his heart.

Living for the world, the boy was dead for him.

And yet he thanked God.

Time went away and he took no count of it. His feet and limbs were cold, but he had no sense of it. The little lamp paled and the chilly dawn came, but he had no perception that it was morning. He sat thinking—thinking of this wonderful thing which that night had brought: of this distant city, where the little fellow who had run barefoot by his side was raised up as a prince amongst men.

Affection quails before the supremacy of art;

as art in its turn cowers under the supremacy of passion.

The boy was dead to him; that he knew.

The old man who had sat quiet and patient, sleeping a little and waking up to warm his hands over his little pot of ashes, touched him at last, almost frightened at the silence and the stillness with which he leaned there, with his head on his hands.

"The dear, good lad!" he said, softly. "He will write himself, 'princeps musicorum' after all;—aye, we always said it;—he and I dreaming here together, the old fool and the young one as they used to say. But do not lament for it, Bruno; I mean do not sorrow for ourselves. He will not forget. He is too true of heart."

Bruno shivered a little, waking to his first sense of the cold that had frozen around him. He rose: he smiled a little.

"I will pray that he may forget," he said, slowly. "When he remembers—then he will have dropped down from this height. He was my lark. I broke his cage. Let him go up—up—up. Why should he fall—for me?"

He spoke dreamily, and he had his hand before his eyes, with the same dull sense of confusion and of wonder which had come upon him when he had first listened to the news. He put out his hand and grasped Luigi Dini's in farewell.

"Tell him I have heard," he said. "Tell him I am glad. What money I can, I will send. There is nothing more to say."

Then he threw his cloak over his mouth, and went down the staircase through the little church that was quite dark. Luigi Dini fumbling with the keys, unlocked the door and let him out; he passed up the street towards the seaward gate, without remembering that his mule stood in Sanfranco's stable.

CHAPTER XIX.

Was he thankless?

No. He thanked God.

God was good: so he said from the depth of his soul. Had not the boy his desire? But Bruno said, "God is good," as the Argive mother said it when, in answer to her prayer for their blessing, her sons were smitten down dead.

She did not doubt the goodness of her gods: nor did he that of his.

But as the woman's heart was rent in two by the fulfilling of her prayer, so was his now.

Some faint hope had been alive in him which he had hated because it was hope, which he had plucked at to pluck out from his soul as the basest and meanest of crimes: some faint hope, cruel, irrepressible.

As he went, some men and women coming from the fair, merry and loud-tongued from wine, tossing their masks by the strings, and flinging white comfits and pellets of chalk one from another up against the closed casements and the iron bars, reeled against him as they passed and recognised him.

"Ah, Bruno, black Bruno!" they called to him, half drunkenly. "There is rare news of your little lad in the city, of Pippa's son, as you call him. A lion in Venice, a lion with wings! Such a fuss never was. The boy is a great man, just at one leap. Bravo! Why not? We will have his music down in Florence at Easter. If he be your own boy—say so now. Claim him while you can get him. Another year he will be too fine to notice you—oh, they are all the same, those sweet-throated birds, when they get a nest of gold and a bough of laurel to sing in—che, che!—he will be like the rest."

Bruno passed them without a blow or a word. And yet men had often hurt him less, and all his blood had been in flame, and his steel had been in their flesh.

The maskers, laughing, dashed their chalk up at the grated casements, and reeled noisily through the still sleeping Lastra; he walked away over the bridge, with the mountain wind fierce in his teeth.

The solitary bell of his own little brown church was ringing for the first mass when he reached the hills above the farm of Fiastra, tolling sadly through the grey winter-fog.

He entered it, and prostrated himself on the stones.

There was no one there save the old priest officiating; the candles burned dully, the white mist had got into the church, and the vapours of it hung about the altar; the voice of the priest seemed to come from a cloud. Some sheep left out all night, forgotten by the shepherd, had crept in and lay huddled together at the foot of one of the pillars; the north wind blew loud without.

Bruno kneeled there in the dampness and the darkness and the bitter cold.

"O God, save the boy always," he prayed with all the might of his heart. "Do not think

of me—if I starve here—if I burn hereafter—it does not matter—I am nothing. Only save the boy."

So he prayed again and again and again, with his forehead on the stones, and his heart going out to the great unknown powers he believed in with a mortal agony of supplication. The world was as a fiend to him that wrestled with him for the soul of Pippa's son. Of himself he could do nothing.

Would heaven be on his side?

Would the great quiet angels stir, and come down and have pity?

When the mass was over, and the old priest, thinking the church empty, had gone away to break his fast, the shepherd, seeking his strayed sheep, followed his dog within the church doors, and found them sleeping together at the foot of the pillar; and found beside them a man stretched face downward, half senseless, in a trance of prayer.

"It is that tall, strong, fierce brute. We thought him made of iron!" said the shepherd, wondering, to his sheep-dog.

CHAPTER XX.

THE next morning old Teresina, being a hale old body, and active, climbed up the slope to Giovoli, and told Palma the tidings.

The girl was hoeing amongst the frost-bitten ground, and digging out cauliflowers.

She straightened her back and listened, with her great eyes open in humid wonder, to the tale the old woman brought; a tale enlarged and glorified, as such narratives ever will be passing from mouth to mouth.

Palma could understand nothing of it; less than any of them. She had never been out of the Lastra. She had never been in any city, or heard any music except that at church and at the country merry-makings such as those at Fiastra. It was all obscure to her, terrible, incomprehen-

sible. It was as if they had told her Signa had been made a king.

"Sure it was his heart's wish, so we ought to be glad," said old Teresina, when all her story was done.

"Yes, indeed," said Palma; but her head was in a whirl, and her throat was full. She knew, as Bruno knew, that, living for the world, he was dead to them—quite dead. All the country was talking of him: how should he remember?

"She is a stupid little mule," thought the old woman, angrily. "She feels nothing, she sees no greatness in it all—she is only good to grub amongst her cabbages."

And she went away huffed, and thinking she herself had been a fool to walk all the way to Giovoli to tell her news.

Palma worked on amongst the hard sods, filling her hand-truck with cauliflowers, which her brother would wheel down to the market at the back of the Palace Strozzi.

She was always hard at work, in the open air in all weathers, and knowing no rest; for they were poorer than ever now her brothers grew so

big; and, what with the mill tax, and the goods tax, and the tax at the gates for every scrap of eatable stuffs or inch of homespun cloth, the lives of the poor are terrible in this land, where all the earth runs over with plenteousness.

Hour after hour she hoed, and dug, and uprooted, and packed the green heads of the vegetables one on another: all the while her heart was like lead, and her tears were dropping.

"One ought to be glad; he would have broken his heart here; one ought to be so glad," she said to herself.

But gladness does not come for the commanding of it, nor at the voice of duty. She could not feel glad; she could only feel, "We shall never be anything more to him—never any more."

Signa had been the one grace, the one poem, the one sweet gleam of leisure, rest, and fancy, in all the dead level of her laborious life.

All the rest was so dull, so hard, so unlovely; all the rest was just one constant uphill struggle for sheer life—one ceaseless rolling of the stone of

poverty upward every day, to have it fall heavy as ever back again with every night. Her father was idle, her brothers were quarrelsome; their needs were many, and their ways of meeting them were few; everyone leaned on her, everybody looked to her, everything was left for her to do and save: she had a nature that would have been happy on a very little, but she had no time to be happy; no one ever thought she could want such a thing. All the loveliness about her always, from the blaze of sunrise over the hills to the mitre flower in the path between the cabbages, she had no time to note; if she had a moment to rest, she was so tired she could only sit down with closed eyes, heavily, stupidly, like an overdriven horse.

Signa alone had sometimes made her look up and see the daybreak, look down and see the cyclamen; Signa alone, with his smile and his song, and his dreams and his fancies, had brought her a little glimpse of that life of the perception and of the imagination without which the human life differs in nothing from that of the blinded ass at the grinding mill.

She clung to him quite unconsciously; he was the sole ray of light in her long dark day of toil: toil that no one thanked her for, because it was so simply her duty and her obligation.

She loved him with the simplest, tenderest, most innocent affection; and with infinite humility, because she so seldom could reach the height of his thought or the stature of his mind. He was the one beauty in her life; he was so unlike all else that surrounded her; even when she knew him wrong, his error was more divine to her than others' right; the hope of him when he was coming, the memory of him when he had gone, had illumined for her so many days of joyless labour; when his life had gone quite out of hers she had been desolate, with a desolation the more absolute because no one guessed, or, guessing, would have pitied it.

And now at his victory she was not surprised. She could not understand it, but she had believed in him as he had believed in himself; and, so believing, had been sure that he would do the thing he wished.

Therefore the news had found her, and had

left her, so quiet—so quiet: only with a weight at her heart like a stone.

She knew, as she had known at Fiastra, his feet might return, but his soul never! She tried to make herself glad; she hated herself because she failed to rejoice.

"He would have broken his heart if he had not succeeded," she said to herself; and all the while she worked amongst the black earth whose chinks were filled with ice, and her feet were numb with cold, and her poor wisp of a woollen shirt was blown through and through by the north wind, and she tried to cheat herself and believe that she was glad.

When the cabbages were all packed, and the rest of the garden labour done, she went within a minute, and got out a little morsel of paper-money sewn within her mattrass, and stood and thought.

Years before it had been given her by her godmother; the only little bit of money she had ever had for herself; and she had been told by her father to spend it on herself; and she had saved it always from year to year, thinking, when

she could get a little bit to add to it, to buy some stockings and shoes for mass days; for she was a little ashamed of her bare feet in the churches. But the other little bit she had never got yet; all that was made by her labour being always wanted for the black bread for the boys' mouths, of which, though she toiled ever so, there was never enough.

She had clung to the hope of getting it always, but day by day, year by year, the hope drifted farther and farther away, and the little scroll of a bank-note was all alone in the mattrass—a yellow tumbled scrap of a few francs in worth.

Now she took it out, and meditated a moment, and then ran down into the town. It was with her as if she were weighted with some heavy burden dragging at her heart-strings with every step; yet with every step she said to herself, "I am glad; oh, dear Madonna, *make* me glad!"

She ran down to a nook in the town where there dwelt a man by name or nick-name Chilindro: a little old man of great repute in the place as a draughtsman, and whose business it

was, for due payment, to make those coloured drawings which by the score adorn the Voto chapels; thank-offerings for great mercies, and propitiatory presents to the saints, where colour is lavish, and perspective unknown, and miracles commemorated in a primitive art that scorns all rule save that of the buyer's fancy.

Chilindro drove a good trade in his art: the peasants love these votive pictures, and believe in them beyond all other ways of pleasing heaven.

Does a man escape death by fire or water, does he fall unharmed from roof or rick; does a child pass through peril unscathed, or a mother hear her son is saved from shipwreck, or a loose horse in mad career pass without trampling on a prostrate creature;—the miracle, if it have been wrought for pious souls, is drawn and painted, or a fitting print is coloured; and the Madonna, or the Saint invoked, beams out from flames or waves or clouds; and the record of the heavenly grace is carried up to some favoured chapel, and hung with thousands of others, to show that there still is gratitude on earth, and plead for further favours still from heaven.

Chilindro did not know how to draw, but that was no matter; in these pictures art is nothing, faith is all things; large splashes of red and blue, and the people taller than the houses, and the Madonna or the Saint always very prominent, that is sufficient. Chilindro was a good old man, and a great gossip, and had a high repute for holiness, and had painted the miracles of the Signa country for thirty years and more, till heavenly interpositions seemed no more to him than the dropping of an apple seems to any other man.

Palma climbed up to the attic against the south wall, where, when times were good and accidents were many, he spent his days, and took his orders, and put on his spectacles, and drew his wonderful wooden men and women, and his shipwrecks with gaping fish far bigger than the vessels, and his blazing hayricks with the Virgin sitting in the flames, and putting them out with the mere borders of her robe; for Chilindro, though he could not draw a straight line, had a very great reputation, and people came from far and near to him, even from the shores of the sea, and the coasts of the

marshes, where the little chapels, that crown the heathered rocks and path, amongst the rosemary over the blue waters, have so many of these offerings from seamen and seamen's wives, and the coral fishers and the trawlers who draw their daily bread from the deep.

Palma went up to the old man, in the dusk of the late winter afternoon, and drew out her piece of yellow paper.

"Is that enough for a good one!" she asked, with all her heart in her eyes.

The old man scanned it prudently.

"It depends on what you want; has your sweetheart been in trouble? Is that it?"

"No," said Palma, too utterly absorbed in longing to do right, to heed the jest or blush for it. "Look; I am not sure what it should be, but something that would please S. Cecilia. It is she who listens to all music, and sends beauty into it, is it not?"

"Aye, aye," said Chilindro, roughly, being not over-sure himself, and preferring fires and shipwrecks, which were all the Madonna's. "Aye, aye, go on, what do you want with S. Cecilia? I

deal with no childishness, you know; that were profane."

Palma leaned both her hands on his table, and her heart was beating so, that he might have seen her rough bodice heave with it, only he was an old man and did not care for girls.

"Profane! oh no; no, no! It is the very life of his life. It is the only thing he loves. If you would do something very beautiful for her that would please her very much, and show her I *am* glad? Something that would please him too, if ever he should see it? I would take it up myself and pray with it, and so she would watch over him always. That was what I thought. This is all the money I have. I have saved it for years; meaning to buy shoes always. If it be enough, if you would make it do? then she would know how glad I try to be. Only I cannot—I cannot—not just at once."

Her voice choked in her throat; her eyes gazed imploringly at the old man, as though he held the keys of heaven; she had absolute faith in the

power of what she strove to do; if she could have given her life-blood to get the picture, she would have given it willingly.

The old man scanned her curiously. She was too thin and ill-clad, and blown and beaten by the weather to have much beauty; yet she looked almost handsome, in her brown, rough, simple way, as she leaned there in the dusk over his board, with her great braids wound about her shapely head, and her breast heaving, and all her soul shining in her eyes.

"It is that boy who has made his fame in Venice," thought the old Chilindro, but he had seen too much of men and women to seem to know the thing they did not wish themselves to tell; he had painted votive offerings for road-brigands in his earlier days, and taken their money and asked nothing but what they chose to say: a still tongue, he held, being as gold to whosoever has the wit to keep it safely tucked behind his teeth. His business was to make the pictures, not to turn people's memories and desires inside out; besides, he saw the story of the girl in her gleaming innocent eyes.

There were so many stories like it; without them half the walls of half the votive chapels would be bare.

He looked at her and at the paper note, then seemed to meditate.

"It is a low price—and S. Cecilia: that is more difficult than the Madonna; she is more hard to please. Our Lady is everywhere. She is used to it. Still I will do my best, you being a young thing, and wishing it so much: only your price is low. Because you will want laurel, and harps, and the trumpet of fame, and all the rest; it is to get triumph for the youth and for his music that you wish?"

"Yes!" said Palma, with a sigh that shuddered her with an infinite pain. "Yes; triumph always, what he longs for—triumph eternal, that shall live longer than he lives. That is what he used to say. Ah, you are good to do it for so little—then they will know in heaven I am glad."

The old Chilindro was silent. He was used to see all woes and joys of human emotion. He was used to mothers, sisters, wives, daughters,

mistresses of men, who came and wept and laughed and prayed, and were mad with rapture at the sweet sudden deliverance from death of some life that made the sum of theirs. But this girl moved him; she was so quiet, and yet there was such longing in her eyes.

Nevertheless, he took her money.

"I will do the picture, and you may come for it this time to-morrow," he said, as he raked up the little note into his leathern bag. "But, that you are wise, I will not say. My dear, in failure, they come back; in success, never."

"I know," said Palma.

"And you still wish the picture?"

"I will be here for it this time to-morrow; and you are good to do it."

Then she went.

Chilindro did no work that night, but went and gossipped: on the morning he did better for her than he did for most; he took a little wood-engraved head of Raffaelle's Cecilia, and left it undaubed by colour, and drew round it in his own clumsy fashion the laurel and the bay, and all immortal symbols, Pagan and Christian, twisted

altogether, and lettered under with the little line "Hauritis acquas in gaudio."

He did not know very well why he wrote that in his flourishing gilded letters, but he thought it would serve its turn.

Then he put it in a plain black frame, which was a free gift, and could not have been claimed as portion of the picture.

It was much simpler than his flames and waves, his azures and his crimsons; and yet, somehow, he thought he liked it better than them all.

With the dusk of the day Palma came for it. To her, too, it seemed beautiful. She looked at it in silence, her hands crossed on her bosom, that he should not see how high it heaved.

"It is good of you to have done so much for me," she said, gently, and then she took the picture and folded it under her ragged woollen shawl, and again went away, without another word.

Chilindro was disappointed.

"I wish I had made her pay for the frame," he thought, as his door shut upon her.

Palma, with the speed of a goat, ran up into

the hills; she had so little time to spare; her brothers would be home by nightfall, clamorous for their dish of soup.

There was a little church high above Giovoli that she loved well; a little old brown tumbling church, where Signa and Gemma had often played with her amongst the old tombs in their babyhood, and sat with the sheep-dog up by the altar, wondering at the little stone children and the broken pieces of jasper and porphyry, and the blazoned S. Sebastian, with the arrows in him, up in the narrow window, cobweb-hung.

And sometimes Signa, with Gemma and her at his feet on the steps of the altar, had sung the chants he sang at matins and complin with the other choir children; and the sweet little flute-like voice of him had gone sighing out through the arched door to the sunshine, and away over the gorge and the rosemary, till it found the thrushes singing too, and was lost in the myrtle leaves with them.

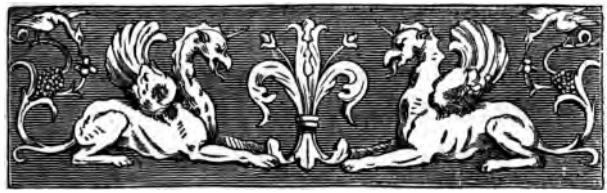
She ran up the hill to this little church; there were no thrushes now, and the rosemary and myrtle were bare, and the savage north wind

pierced her through and through, and the ice in the clefts cut her feet.

It was just open for evening service.

There were a few scattered huts and farms, whose peasants would steal into it sometimes, and sit down in the darkness and rest, if they did not pray. She went in and threw herself down on her knees in the corner nearest the altar. It was there that she meant to ask to have the picture hung,—just there; where the old broken rail was still bright with the jasper, and where Signa had used to sit and sing.

"Oh, dear God! I am glad, indeed; I am glad!" she said, as she kneeled with her hand on the stone and the little picture close clasped against her breast. "Gemma is dead; and he is the same as dead to me. But Gemma is safe with you and the angels, and he has the thing that he wished. I am glad, indeed, I am glad. I would not have them back—oh, no!—only perhaps he will see the picture once, and then he will know I did what I could; then he will know. —I am glad!"



CHAPTER XXI.

MEANWHILE Lippo, in the Lastra, read the news-sheets, and walked with meek pride among the idlers at the house-doors at the close of the working-day.

"Yes—my nephew," he would say, with some new journal in his hand, out of which he could spell some fresh description of the successes of the Actea. "Dear boy! to see how great he is. And to think that if I, or rather my good father-in-law, had not advanced the money for that little bit of land, all this great talent might have been buried forever—aye!—it makes one proud to have been the humble means. But, indeed, in his babyhood, I foresaw the bent that he would have; you will remember; I always spared him to chant in

any church they sought him for. I knew it was fine practice, and what young life can begin holier than by using God's gifts to praise His saints? It always brings a blessing. 'Put the child to work' people said always; but I, and Nita too, said, 'No; as far as we have aught to do with him, we dedicate him, as the parents did the little Samuel, to the sacred offices of the Temple.' Only then Bruno interfered, and would not have it, because the church only gives but a few pence; as if it were pence brought the blessing!—but that is all bygone. I wish to bury all remembrance of difference. Only poor Bruno is so hard and harsh. Oh, yes, it is all true! all printed here; the Syndic of Genoa sent him special entreaty to be present at the first representation in the Carlo Felice, and all the town was dressed with flags, and strangers flocking from all parts; it might have been a victory with half a million of men killed and wounded, for all the mighty rejoicing that there was. It does seem wonderful; and he such a little lad! But he does not forget us. No; he wrote to Nita yesterday, and

sent a necklace of pearls for our Richetta, remembering she is sixteen years old to-day. Was it not pretty, and so grateful? But he knows who were always his true friends—dear boy! Nita will show you the pearls if you go all of you upstairs. He is so fond of us, and we of him; only he cannot let it be seen when he stays here, because his first duty is, I always say, to Bruno; and we know what Bruno is."

And Lippo would go up the street, and murmur much the same at other houses in the short twilight of the shortening days; and his townsfolk listened, and ended in believing him.

True, some sceptic said that the pearls were old ones of his mother's that he had had reset himself on the jeweller's bridge down in the city; and some of those malignant souls that keep long memories for the torment of their fellow-creatures, since most folks like to write their lives in sand, remembered one with another a little fellow, beaten black and blue, who had run hungry about all day on Lippo's errands.

But these were in a very small minority.

Baldo was a warm man, the Lastra knew, the

Lastra itself being usually cold, so far as empty pockets go; and Lippo had got the bit of land upon the hill, and had added another little bit to it; and had moreover such a pretty way of lending money at convenient moments to his neighbours; and, when obliged to ask for it back again at inconvenient ones, sorrowed so and wept, and took high interest with such reluctance or such protestation of it, that the Lastra could not quarrel with him, nor object to seeing with his eyes.

Lippo grew daily into a power in the little place; and Bruno, all the Lastra knew—and Signa-on-the-Hill knew, too—had always been a dangerous, dark man, who kept his own counsel in churlish silence, whilst candid cheerful Lippo laid his heart bare as a good comrade should, and kept close thoughts in nothing.

The Lastra, like the world, did not mind a little lying; it was the life of gossip; but silence it would not forgive; silence was the highest sin and the biggest.

And Baldo felt so much respect for him in consequence, and had so high an opinion of his

judgment, that he gave his money for any scheme of investment or modes of purchase that his son-in-law proposed.

"Lippo had not a centime of his own," said the shoemaker to his special gossips, "but then he knows how to plant a centime in the ground, so as to make it take root and blossom into hundreds. That is better perhaps than to be born with money—to know the art of getting and turning about other people's. The miller gains more by the wheat than the farmer does."

It could hardly be said that Baldo ever liked his son-in-law. But he grew to be glad of him and to believe in his good sense.

"Nature makes some folks false as it makes lizards wriggle," said he. "Lippo is a lizard. No dog ever caught him napping, though he looks so lazy in the sun."

Bruno had never known how, or knowing, never would have troubled himself, to please the people round him.

Lippo did know.

"It is no good to make your life into a bit of solid silver fit for goldsmiths, and shut it up in

a cupboard: you will get no credit," he said to himself. "Make it into a dish of tomatoes, and put plenty of garlic in; and let every one put a finger into it, and lick his finger afterwards: then they will always speak well of you, and think they helped to cook the dish as well as eat it, and so will take a pride—even when your plates are all cracked—in you."

And Lippo always ate his tomatoes in public, and so was much beloved, and turned his vinegar to oil.

"I thought he was a ne'er-do-weel," said Baldo. "But I was wrong. For pretty lying, nicely buttered, and going down like a fig in a dog's throat, there is not his equal anywhere—not anywhere."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE spring came in Venice.

There were flowers all the day long everywhere, and music all the night; the swallows and the doves were happy in the cloudless air; the sweet sea wind only blew softly enough to lift the hair of the women standing on the wet marble stairs to meet the boats of fish and of fruit.

It was the city of Desdemona, of Stradella, of Giorgione, of Consuelo. Signa lived in it as in a dream; this silence enfolded him like sleep—sleep filled with the stir of birds' wings, the sound of waves, the sigh of the wind in the casements full of lilies, the murmurs of amorous whispers.

"Am I awake?" he would say to himself in this wonderful trance of slumberous delight,

when all the air was full of his own melodies and all the people's eyes turned after him.

Signa drifted on the tide of the city's praise and passion, like a rose dropped on a smooth flowing river. He hardly wondered. The women's touch and words would make him colour like a girl, and he submitted to them with a soft timidity, graceful as the bending of a reed in the wind. Otherwise he was quite tranquil. No glory and no beauty could be quite so glorious or so beautiful as those of his dreams.

To him who had dreamed of a triumph like Petrarca's and a grave like Palestrina's, who had dreamed of gates of gold for his Lastra, and all the nations of the earth for his singers; to him nothing could appear very startling or very great. True, he was only a little contadino, who still loved best his feet shoeless and his breast bare; a little rustic from the vines and the olives, happiest to sit in the sun and eat a slice of bread and a handful of fruit; but the native grace of movement and absence of self-consciousness made him as serene in a ducal palace as on the hillside at home, and less moved at a prince's compliment

than at the shout of a boatman or a fruit-seller.

He came into the fame that welcomed him as a young heir into his heritage. It was nothing strange to him. He had looked for it so long.

"Only to long and dream, and give up all hope, and then to wake of a sudden and find the dream all true—that is to be happy, indeed!" he would say to himself; and happy he was with the sweet, glad, thoughtless innocence of a child. So happy that he never thought to turn his steps backward to those who watched at home on the high lonely hill in the light of the setting sun.

Every day, indeed, he thought; "To-morrow I will go." But when the morrow became the present day, he still said—"To-morrow!"

He was caressed, adored, feasted, sought, done homage to all through the city in the months of spring. In any other country there might have been a coarseness in the adulation, a vulgarity of fashion in the universality of praise which might have sated or have nauseated him; but here, in the city that heard the serenades of Stradella and held the women of Tiziano, it was

all one simple impulse of ardour, one unstudied outburst of rapture, one sweet natural inspiration answering his own as the whole forest full of song birds answers the first morning singer at sunrise; and the days were one long festa, and the gondolas wafted him from palace to palace, and all women caressed him, from the bare-limbed fish-girl, standing in the surf of the Lido, to the jewelled lady leaning on her fringed cushions of silk.

Others beside the Moon leaned down to kiss this young Endymion.

He was so great a rarity to them; so innocent, so shy, and yet so full of grace; with all his peasant's simplicity and ignorance, yet so far away from them by that look in his eyes and that serious beauty of his fancies; so utterly unlearned in all the usage of the world, and yet so dreamfully calm amidst it all as if he were some young marble god that had been touched to life out from his sleep of twice a thousand years in Latin soil.

For he was dreaming of another opera.

He had the story of the Lamia in his head.

The Venus Lamia of Athens; the young Greek flute-player, whose face is still seen on the carved amethyst in the library of the Louvre; she, who, in Alexandria, made captive, became the sovereign mistress of her conqueror, and by the magic of her music and her beauty, vanquished the victor of Ptolemy and changed death into love.

He knew very little of any other learning than his own sweet science, but here and there the old classic stories had beguiled him, and the "Lamia" had of all others pleased him; perhaps because the girl, who became a goddess by force of a man's passion for her, had been a high priestess of his own art, and by that art had changed death into love.

In the glad spring days, the music for his Lamia came to him as the butterflies came in on the sea breeze over the white lilies in his window. The Actea had been solemn with the gloom of wasted love and martyred courage; the Lamia as she came to birth was radiant with all the glory of young life.

He had read the story one day sitting on a boat's keel on the Lido sands, with his feet in the

water and the white sea-birds above his head in the sunshine. He saw his Lamia in the waves of light that ebbed and flowed from the shining sea to the shining skies; saw her though he had never seen the amethyst; saw her with her pure Greek face and her passionate eyes and her floating veil and her fillet that marked her the priestess of melody—the Lamia Aphrodite of Athens.

And the story haunted him, and the music came with it, and had all the passion in it that was in all the air around him, and yet not in his own heart; that women here breathed on his own young lips, and yet which left him so unmoved to it, as the sirocco goes over a lyre and leaves it mute.

The red sullen glow of old Nile, the white serene radiance of Athens, the brooding darkness of Egypt, the living rings of the dance chain of the Hormus, the palm-crowned virgins in the feasts of Hyacinthus—all the faces and things gone from the earth three thousand years and more—became living and visible to him. Actea had been but a shadow to him in his music;

Lamia lived for him and smiled. Women wanted him to love them. He did not. But he almost loved Lamia.

"Shall I see her likeness living one day?" he thought; and his face grew warm.

It was the first time that any thought, save that of his music, had quickened the pulse of his heart.

"You do not care for us," said a young fisher-girl, with her beautiful bronze limbs thrown down by him on the sand, and with her hands stroking his hair.

Signa smiled.

"Oh, no! Why should I? I see creatures so much lovelier than any of you on earth."

"Where?" said the girl of the Lido.

"In the sun—in the sea—where the swallows go—where the shadows are—anywhere, everywhere. But most beautiful of all when I close my eyes, and play in the dark—so softly; and then they come."

"Who come?" said the girl.

"Ah, who!" said Signa, and he smiled lying back on the sand, with his eyes on the blueness of the vault above him.

"Does no one love you at home?" said the girl.

"Only a man," said Signa.

"And the great ladies here? The princesses?—that one with the blue and gold in her gondola, who seeks you so often?"

"She is—a princess. And I, I am only a peasant, you know. At least I was yesterday."

"Then you do not love her; though she loves you?"

"No."

"And you do not love me?"

"No, dear."

"Then, what is it you love?"

"The things that I hear," said Signa. "And I will love the Lamia when I find her."

CHAPTER XXIII.

With the spring a little house was reared on the bit of ground by the brook; a little square, low house, of the grey stone that is quarried above; roofed with red tiles, and entered by a small arched door.

A peasant came to live in it; a very poor labouring man, who could hardly keep body and soul together; but he was enough for the work of the place. The corn was green and promised fairly; the olives and the vines were well set for blossom the reeds and the rushes grew all the thicker for deep winter rains and some weeks of hard frost.

When the little grass paths between the fields were all white with the clusters of the sweet-smelling snowflakes, that are called in this

country the churchbells of the spring, there came up on Sundays and days of Feast, a handsome, pensive-looking man; a black-browed, stout-built woman, with a red shawl and gold pins in her uncovered hair; and a tribe of riotous children.

Bruno, working in his cattle-shed, saw them.

They were Lippo and the family of Lippo.

They came up often, and brought a flask of wine with them, and rolls of bread and cold-meats, and would sit down under the olives and eat and drink, and see the children race about, and laugh very noisily, and seem the very soul and symbol of content;—never quarrelling by any chance whatever.

Bruno saw them through the trees. Their words could not reach him, but the echo of their laughter did.

They were friends of the cheese-seller no doubt. The cheese-seller never cared to come up thither himself; perhaps being so far away down in the city.

Bruno never spoke of it; and no one ever spoke of it to him.

Who would, must come. He was a stranger there.

Later on fell S. Mark's Day.

Bruno was at work.

Since he had lost the land and the boy, he could not keep the saints' days holy; he could not lie idle in the sun; he could not endure the quiet of leisure. Unless he had always some toil to do, some effort to make, he felt as if he would turn sick or mad, or do some evil thing. In the dawn he would go to the first mass; that done, he laboured all the rest of the day till nightfall.

He was digging up his early potatoes and shaking the earth off the roots; it was a calm, bright day; there had been showers; the yellow water iris was pricking up in every runlet, and the little black velvet lily, that the city took for her arms and her emblem, was in the grass everywhere wherever he turned.

He did not strike them down with his spade now. Signa had cared so much for flowers.

He was working on the side of his farm that looked upward to the land he had lost.

There was a belt of fir-trees between him and it, and then a field of young barley, and then again another row of firs. Looking down on the black earth and the green plants of the potatoes, he did not see three men come through the trees and stand and look at him.

He only raised his head as a voice said his name softly.

Then he saw his brother Lippo, with his youngest child clinging to his knees, and beside him his two friends, Momo the barber, and Tonino the tinman.

"Bruno!" said Lippo, very softly.

Bruno struck his spade deep down into the earth, and struck his heel on it; and seemed as though he had not heard.

Lippo left the nearer belt of firs between his brother and himself. He stood at a little distance amongst the half-grown barley. His youngest child, a girl of three years old, with a face like a little St. John, and a temper like her mother's, clung to him, dressed in fresh white clothes, and with a knot of red field tulips in her hand.

"Bruno—dear Bruno," said he, softly. "You must see us often here. I thought I would come and tell you; you might hear it by accident and wonder. I thought you would be sorry for your land to go out of the family; once having been in it. So — the name was Avellino's, I have known him long and well, a most good creature; but the money was mine, and the land is transferred to me, you understand? I am a poor man, but I have a kind father-in-law, and when one has so many young ones, one tries to save and better oneself—you understand? I thought you would be glad. And you will see us often here; and if you will be neighbourly and brotherly, dear Bruno, both Nita and I shall be most willing. The children might come in and cheer you, you so lonely here—"

The self-satisfied, soft smile died off his face; the little girl hid hers and screamed. Yet Bruno had done nothing; he had only dashed his spade into the soil to stand erect there by itself, and stood with his eyes blazing upon Lippo's. Then by the mightiest effort of his life he controlled himself, and bent over the earth and dug again,

stamping his foot down on the iron as though he stamped a traitor's life out with it.

Lippo waited with a vague and gentle appeal upon his face, and a look every now and then of gentlest wonder at his friends.

Bruno dug on, scattering the black ground right and left.

"Will you not speak, dear Bruno?" said Lippo, mournfully. "I thought to give you pleasure!"

Bruno stood erect.

"Christ spoke to Iscariot—and forgave him. He was the Son of God. I am a man. If you say one word, or tarry one moment, I will brain you where you stand."

Momo the barber, and Tonino the tinman plucked back at Lippo's sleeve.

"Come away—come away. He is possessed—"

"Envy!" murmured Lippo, with a sigh, and let himself be led away back through the green and bending barley.

Bruno, leaning on his heavy spade, breathed loudly, like a man exhausted; the veins of his

throat swelled; his bronzed face grew black with the rush of blood.

"Christ, keep my hands from blood guiltiness," he muttered. "I cannot!—I cannot!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Down in the Lastra at evening, Momo the barber and Tonino the tinman told the townsfolk how Bruno had threatened his brother's life for the second time :—beware the third!

"We heard him ourselves. It is worse than Cain!" they said, in the merry little wineshop in the Place of Arms. "He squandered away his bit of land just to keep his boy in lewd living away in the cities; and good Lippo, to do the matter delicately, bought it back, only getting another's name, not to seem too forward or hurt him too much, and thinking only of saving his brother's credit, so that it should not pass to a stranger; and when he breaks this to him, so prettily—oh, so prettily!—and offers him love, and good will, and the children to keep him com-

pany, the brute threatens only to brain him;—to brain him with the spade he worked with, and said that the Son of God should have done the same by Iscariot! It is too horrible! Lippo is a saint, else would he bid the guards of the law keep their watch over Bruno. This we heard with our own ears. This we saw with our own eyes."

And the wineshop echoed, "Worse than Cain!"

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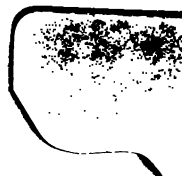
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